PS3 PlayStation 3
PSP PlayStation Portable
PlayStation 2

PlayStation

al Magazine

Issue 048 August 2011

TOUCH & GO

Hands-on with the PS Vita launch lineup

THE HEAVY HITTERS

Modern Warfare 3

Batman: Arkham City

Final Fantasy XIII-2

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 48 (August 2011)

NINJA GAIDEN 3

PS3's deadliest assassin unmasked

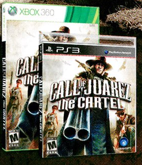
WE KISS AND TELL

Catherine's secrets

Future MEDIA WITH PASSION

Boners, Johnson, and One-Eyed Willy p.76

SHOOTOUT AT HIGH NOON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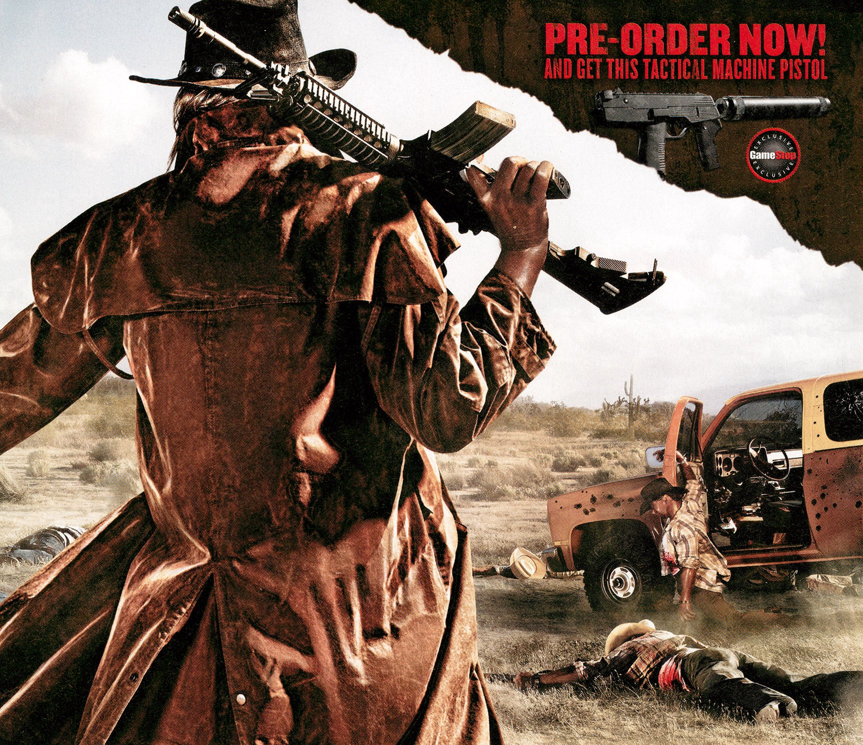

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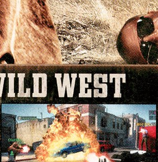

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AUGUST 2011

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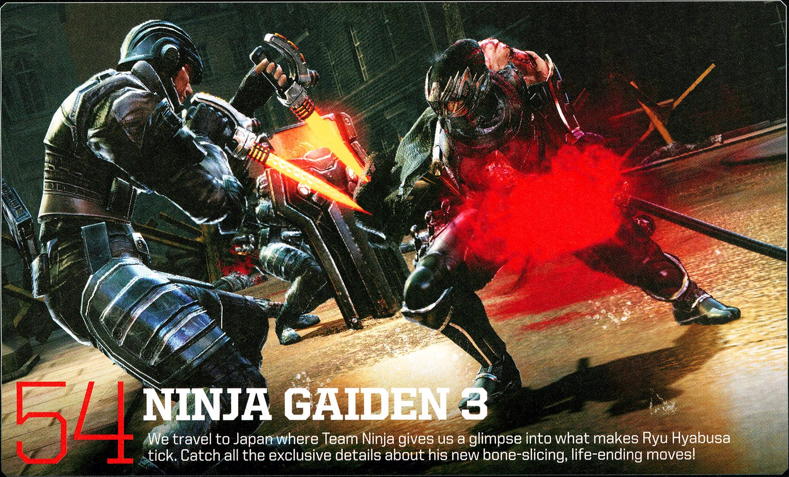

54 NINJA GAIDEN 3

We travel to Japan where Team Ninja gives us a glimpse into what makes Ryu Hyabusa tick. Catch all the exclusive details about his new bone-slicing, life-ending moves!

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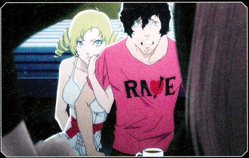

64 CATHERINE

Bipedal sheep and beautiful women inhabit Atlus' first foray into the PS3 realm.

70 PS VITA AHOY

Hands-on time with nine Vita titles has left us suffering from withdrawal. Please send help.

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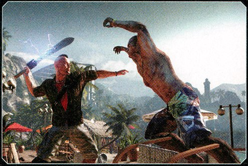

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Find out what's with all the sheep.

PS Vita Hands-On 70
Nine games, two hands.

32 **CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3**
New York lies in ruin as conflict erupts across the globe. It's up to us (and our trusty guns, of course) to set things straight. After witnessing two levels in action, color us impressed.

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80 **INFAMOUS 2**
Worst static electricity problem evar.

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76 **SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED**
Would we journey to hell for our true love? Perhaps not. Maybe the corner store though.

Passion Play

For this editor, it was love at first save

I remember the very moment I fell in love with gaming. It was 1987, and I held in my hands that one-of-a-kind gold-colored cartridge. I was about to pop in *The Legend of Zelda* and enter a rich world of mystery and adventure.

A few hours in, I was amazed—for all the usual reasons. This, however, wasn't when I was struck with Link's magic arrow. Oh, I already adored games, and this game most of all. I played games as much as a boy my age could. But love was not to come until later. Specifically, the next day, when I started my next marathon session.

I turned on my NES, then hit continue. And the game picked up right where I left off. No codes to input. No levels to replay. I was back in a world that remembered me.

It's amazing how something so simple as a battery backup save system can change the face of gaming. Back then, however, it meant everything. I was in a special place that, somehow, existed even when I didn't play it. This, to me, was the missing link—the key to unlocking a deeper sense of immersion than previously existed. Yes, Zelda's world itself was remarkable, but now I finally felt like I was doing something "real"—all thanks to a simple battery in a cartridge.

These days, games have to work a lot harder to extend that illusion of reality. But our past three cover stories have done a lot to bring our games to the proverbial next level. *Tomb Raider* plans to take us on an emotional journey, using the language of games to reach for deeper truths. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* is so vast and so open that we can't help but feel like the author of our own story. And now, *Ninja Gaiden 3* is forcing us to confront what it truly feels like to be a cold-blooded assassin. All three are reasons enough to fall in love with gaming all over again.

GARY

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief
twitter.com/TinyManRages

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief
Once upon a time, esteemed editor Gary Steinman shot a man in Reno just to watch him die. Unfortunately, the man did not die, and the experience proved unfulfilling for all those involved, especially Charlton Heston.

Roger Burchill
Managing Editor
Every issue of PTOM is filled with the blood, sweat, and tears of its editors, but no one bleeds, sweats, or cries more than the illustrious Roger Burchill. Now bring him a drink before he gets dehydrated.

Ken Bousquet
Art Director
As the proud owner of not one but *two* shoes, master artist Ken Bousquet can often be seen enjoying such activities as walking, running, and occasionally even sauntering. Don't ask why he never skips.

Scott Butterworth
Associate Editor
Some say it's the bomb that will bring us together, but Scott Butterworth knows that if you give peace a chance, it'll turn on you before you can say "egalitarianism." Always remember, war is peace.

Anne Lewis
Editorial Intern
Intern Anne "Anne" Lewis started life as a tap dancin' fool but was forced to quit after rockin' around every clock in existence. Since then, she's taken up bottle cap collecting, windsurfing, and skee ball.

Ryan Taljonick
Editorial Intern
When he's not dutifully assembling peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the PTOM staff, shiny new editorial intern Ryan Taljonick can be found enjoying the finer things in life. Things like "rent control."

PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

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REPRINTS: Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com.

PLAYSTATION: THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE (ISSN: 1941-5303) is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in South San Francisco, CA, and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Subscriptions: One year basic rate (12 issues) US: $18.00, Canada: US$26.00. Canadian orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST #R128220688). PMA #40612608. Prepaid in US funds only. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to PlayStation: The Official Magazine, P.O. Box 5154, Harlan, IA 51593-0654. Ride-along enclosure in the following editions: None. Standard Mail enclosure in the following editions: None. Returns: Pitney Bowes, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @Gamer, Crochet Today!, Guitar Aficionado, Guitar World, Knitting Today!, Mac|Life, Maximum PC, Nintendo Power, The Official Xbox Magazine, PC Gamer, Revolver, Windows: The Official Magazine, and World of Warcraft Official Magazine.

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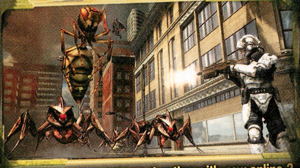
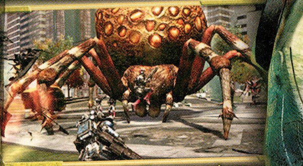
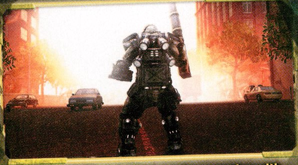
EARTH DEFENSE FORCE® INSECT ARMAGEDDON™



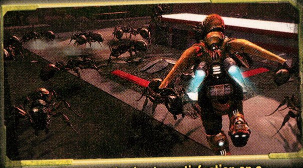
NEW! Intense squad based action with new online 3 player co-op and 6 player survival modes, and classic split-screen multiplayer mode



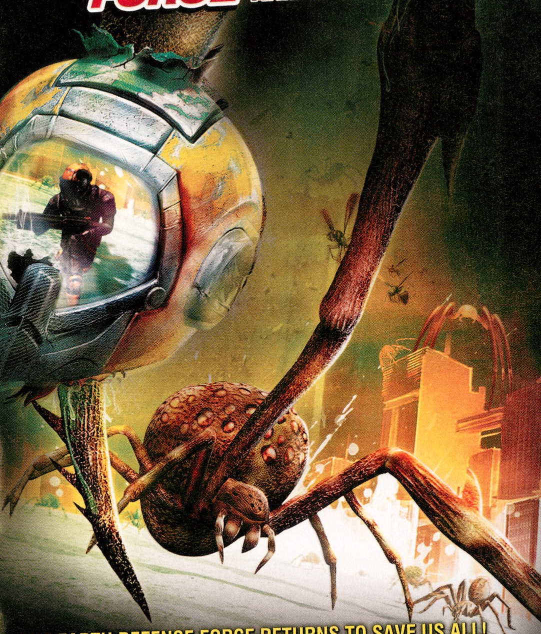
NEW! 4 upgradeable armors and over 300 weapons to collect!



EDF's trademark inferno mode gameplay with thousands of bugs and robots to kill in a completely destroyable city!



Raw, arcade shooter satisfaction on a gigantic modern scale



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Animated Blood
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

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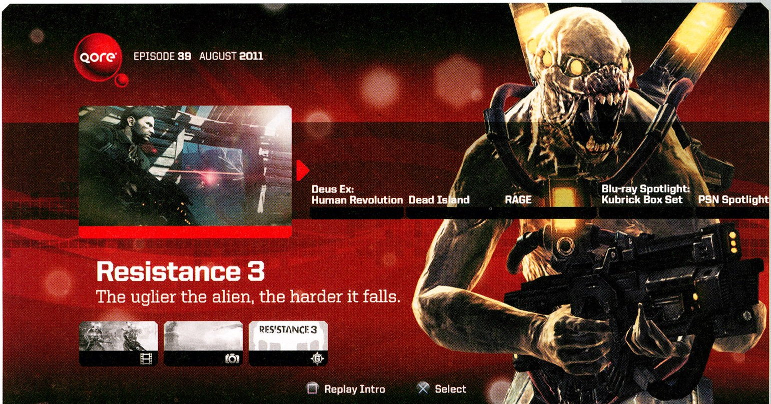
Inside Qore Episode 39

Simply Irresistible

It's futile to avoid the next Insomniac Games blockbuster; we're talking about *Resistance 3*, the alternate-reality battle that pits aliens against 1950s Americans. Then, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* goes back to the original game's FPS-RPG (OMG) roots, tapping into the style that so many others have tried to duplicate. How about a trip to *Dead Island*; that sounds like a happy place, right? Let's find out together, in this zombie-survival action game. And John Carmack is renowned for pushing hardware to the max; Id's new game-and-engine, *RAGE*, is ready to pop off your screen.

VERONICA BELMONT HOST OF QORE

Available 8/2/2011 on the PlayStation® Network


qore EPISODE 39 AUGUST 2011
Deus Ex: Human Revolution
Dead Island
RAGE
Blu-ray Spotlight: Kubrick Box Set
PSN Spotlight
RESISTANCE 3
Replay Intro
Select

Resistance 3

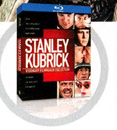
The uglier the alien, the harder it falls.

Resistance 3
Road trip through 1950s Americana to fight the alien invasion.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution
We're only human after all? Speak for yourself.

Dead Island
What happens on Dead Island stays on Dead Island.

RAGE
Skip the anger management class this week, and get lost in the stunning setting.


STANLEY KUBRICK

Blu-ray Spotlight - Kubrick Box Set
How about a bit of the old ultra-violence?

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Individual episodes can be purchased for $2.99 and a 13-episode subscription can be purchased for $24.99. Qore subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

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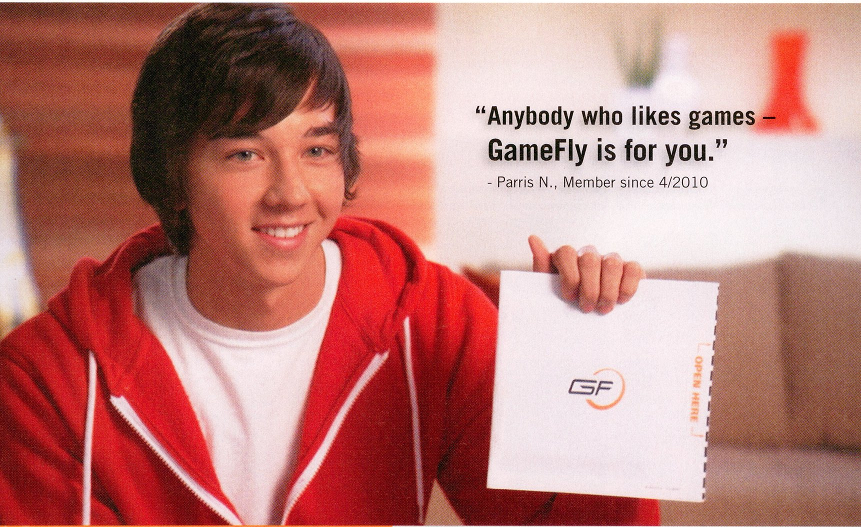
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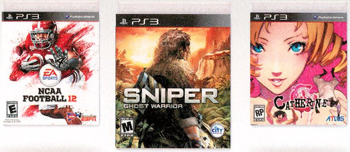
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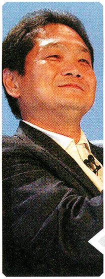
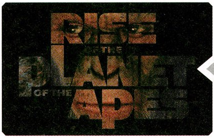


PS3
White Knight Chronicles II

AUG. 02

In Stores
White Knight Chronicles II, Phineas and Ferb: Across the Second Dimension


Rise of the Planet of the Apes

05

Those Damn, Dirty Apes
Rise of the Planet of the Apes arrives in theaters today, and we have hereby put a ban on all primate puns in the office.

06

Great Escapes
On this day in 1926, Harry Houdini spent 91 minutes underwater in a sealed tank before escaping. We were once trapped in a bathroom stall for 91 minutes.

08

Ken Kutaragi's Birthday
It is thanks to this man that we have a job. The least we can do is wish the Father of PlayStation a happy birthday.

09

First Love
Oh, Phoebe, how we love thee…especially in HD. An entire generation of gamers reminisces with the *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* blu-ray, out today.

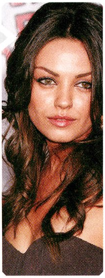
12

8/12-14 Outside Lands
Muse, The Shins, MGMT, and many others are performing at San Francisco's Outside Lands Music and Arts Festival.

Outside Lands
12-14

14

Mila Kunis' Birthday
Famously from *That '70s Show* and *Family Guy*, she recently found herself in the film thriller, *Black Swan*. That's a big leap for our birthday girl.



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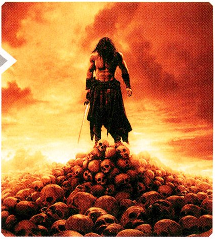
In Stores
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise

PS3
No More Heroes
KONAMI

18

Movie Recycling Day
Three remakes—*Conan the Barbarian*, *Spy Kids 4*, and *Fright Night*—arrive in theaters. How's that for originality?



23

Viva la Revolution!
Deus Ex: Human Revolution hits shelves today. Each copy comes with an augmentation of the buyer's choice. X-ray vision might be fun. **Also out:** *Lord of the Rings: War in the North*

PS3
Deus Ex
Human Revolution
eidos
Square Enix

25

Kiss and Make-Up Day
Kisses don't make everything better. Just ask the man whose house we may have accidentally burnt down. The kiss just made it worse.

"Kiss and Make-Up"

29

Hideo Kojima's Birthday
Seriously? He does not look 48 at all. We're just sayin'—he's a handsome man. There's nothing wrong with that. Happy birthday, Mr. Kojima!

PS3
EA Sports
Madden NFL 12

31

For the Love of the Game
Football season starts today, even if the NFL season doesn't—thanks to *Madden NFL 12*.

* Release dates are subject to change by the publishers.

THERE IS NO EASY WAY IN.

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

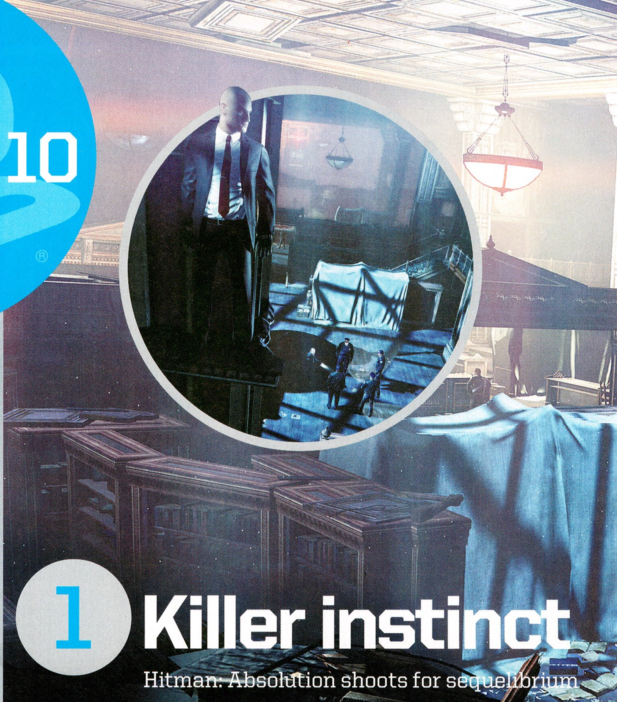
Dragon On
More info, more details on Bethesda's next great RPG.
▸▸Page 12

Pardon Our French
Rayman's new adventure is looking @#$@! beautiful.
▸▸Page 16

Air Superiority
Namco's flight sim aims to add choppers and storyline.
▸▸Page 20

Elitist Attitude
Call of Duty's online battles set to expand with new features.
▸▸Page 22

The Great Debate
PTOM editors shoot it out over L.A. Noire and Heavy Rain. ▸▸
Page 24



1 Killer instinct

Hitman: Absolution shoots for sequelibrium

The *Hitman* series has never been for the squeamish, and IO Interactive's newest, *Absolution*, is certainly no exception. It's the first to emerge from under the wings of Eidos' new publisher, Square Enix—and from what we've seen it appears to have benefited greatly from the partnership.

The portion we're shown takes place in Chicago; there's a citywide manhunt on for Agent 47, who's holed up inside a dark, dilapidated library as a group of cops enter and begin to comb the ground floor. It's a great setup, allowing 47 to peer down from behind a bookshelf on the second floor. "I want this placed turned upside down," the captain barks at his men, who begin poking around the building, their flashlights splintering off into a dozen different directions. Eventually, one of them finds the fuse box and manages to return power to the overhead lights, which turn on with a loud *ker-thunk*; what follows is 15 minutes of Agent 47 at his stealthy, violent best.

For the first time, Agent 47 makes use of something the developers have dubbed Instinct Mode. As with Batman and Sam Fischer before him, this essentially allows the player to see the world through the extra-keen eyes of Agent 47. He can see through walls, as well as the intended paths of foes, allowing the player to better plot his next move.

Creeping through the building and avoiding contact, Agent 47 eventually makes his way toward the fuse box, which he scrambles; when the unfortunate cop returns to fix it, he's choked with a power cord. At one point

> “The moment-to-moment action feels more precise, tense, and engrossing than in previous *Hitman* titles.”

47 grabs a sculpted bust and smashes it over the head of a cop inspecting a construction hole, knocking him down it. In a rather acrobatic move, he then pulls himself onto an adjacent ledge, seamlessly yanking yet another cop by the neck and down the same hole.

Developed using IO Interactive's own in-house tech, *Absolution* looks fantastic. The game employs an impressive evolution of *Kane & Lynch 2's* environmental effects, doing an excellent job of creating atmosphere through subtle use of bloom lighting, particles, and deft color-palette management. The moment-to-moment action also feels more precise, tense, and engrossing than in previous *Hitman* titles; chalk this up, at least partially, to the game's much-improved A.I.—which uses an "intelligence spectrum," as the devs call it—to bring its NPCs to life.

Agent 47 also gets his hands on a pistol, which he quickly uses to take a cop hostage. As he holds a gun to the cop's head and uses his victim's body as a human shield, some dozen officers immediately swing around and train their weapons on 47, who slowly backs away from them. The music intensifies, as does 47's grip; snapping the officer's neck, he retreats up the stairs behind him. It's thrilling, cinematic stuff—and so is the helicopter chase that follows.

After taking out several more cops in equally grizzly fashion—one has his neck snapped with a billy club, another has his body (carefully) dragged and dumped into an empty room—47 swaps outfits and dons a police uniform. Soon after, he stumbles into the quintessential hippie apartment: candles lit, incense burning, Hendrix posters glowing...and a bunch of pot plants growing. "Oh sh–t, man! It's the fuzz, we're so busted!" screams a resident as a chopper hovers outside their window. But 47 never panics: At one point, one of the young men offers him a bong—which 47 promptly bashes over a police officer's head.

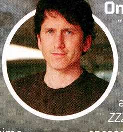
Eventually, Agent 47 leaves the scene, looking every bit the officer in his CPD uniform; stepping out of the building, he wanders into a massive, dynamic crowd of pedestrian foot traffic, recalling *Assassin's Creed*. This much seems certain: If IO can manage to maintain the pace, density, and drama found in this short gameplay slice throughout the whole of *Absolution*, we could be looking at one of 2012's more impressive titles.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

2 Massively single-player

Six fascinating tidbits about The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim from game director Todd Howard



On balancing such an enormous game
"Everybody on the team plays the game a ton. Every week, we playtest. We have a really cool system that shows where everybody goes, like a heat map of the world. We know where everybody went, and how much time they spent there. We can internally track every single thing, who finished a quest when. We track *everything* everybody does. The issue is not in the actual work of doing the balance, it's the issue of collecting the data and then deciding what to do. We could tune the game pretty fast, it's just knowing what dials to press."

On magical shield wards
"When the whole magic design started out, we had a very nice 'you're blocking, and you're attacking' paradigm, and then we went, 'Okay, let's do it with magic.' So we have these magical shields called wards, and you hold down the trigger and it goes *ZZZOOOP* and it builds up as a *WHSSHHH* and encases you. It looks like a giant, burning contact lens, and it blocks pretty much all magic. Now, a powerful-enough spell will blow through it. So a spell will hit it and [your ward will] go down, and if it hits you again it goes away. If you're holding it up and it breaks, you'll get really staggered. You'll wish you hadn't been holding it up, because now you can't do anything for a bit. Kind of like when wizards have wand duels."

On multiplayer
"We consider it every time. And then it loses, and we don't do it. I would say that we've definitely considered, or put up on the white board, or talked about every permutation of multiplayer and co-op—from on the same screen, to the way *Red Dead* does it—but we want to focus on single-player. That's where our hearts are."

On sabotaging a town's economy
"We generate quests where we want you to mess with certain towns, and [destroying industries] is one of the ways you could do it. Now, the impact of that—it's not a big thing. I think it's always nice on paper to say: You can

do this, and you can mess with the economy. But the end result of that is usually far too granular for anyone to notice. So we're still messing with what you'll actually notice in the economy itself. What we think we're going to do is, there'll just be certain types of things that won't be available. Like, you won't be able to buy arrows or wood-based things in that town, and if you sell them, they're higher-priced. But even that doesn't change things *that* dramatically. It's more of a flavor thing. But we do have three types [of industry]: We have farms, we have the wood mills, and we have mines."

On PC-style modding

"One of the things our fans do—obviously on the PC—is they make mods. We're going to have the tools out, and they make mods. Those file formats work on the consoles. If you were to have a kit and take a user's mod and put it on, it would work. Now, there's a big barrier to that actually existing for consumers—between security and the console manufacturers. It's something that may happen one day. It will not happen for release, but it's another thing that we're looking into.

"There are games on consoles doing it now. The *Rock Band* store is probably the best example. We have considered many, many permutations of that as well, because it's something that's really cool for our PC audience. It's one of the things they really enjoy about it, and we'd like to bring it to the PlayStation audience as well. But the PC world's a little bit different, where you can download those [mods] and they'll break your game. It's less official."

On pants and the wearing thereof

"We found that when we went to do the more Norse-style outfits, they end up being these longer armor-shirt things with a belt cinch. The pants became, visually, less than five percent of what you were seeing. So having us separate all those out as separate units became superfluous. So in the armor now, there isn't a cuirass and greaves, there's just Elven armor. And it comes with the leggings."

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MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Intense Violence
Blood
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Drug Reference
Use of Alcohol

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

GAMING EVOLVED AMD

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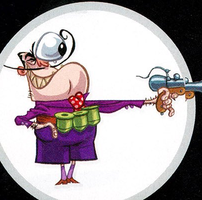
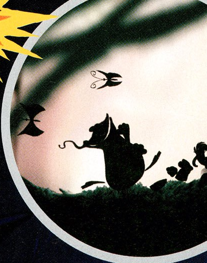




Even when they're obscured by shadows, Rayman and Globox still manage to display remarkable personality.

3 Limbs are overrated

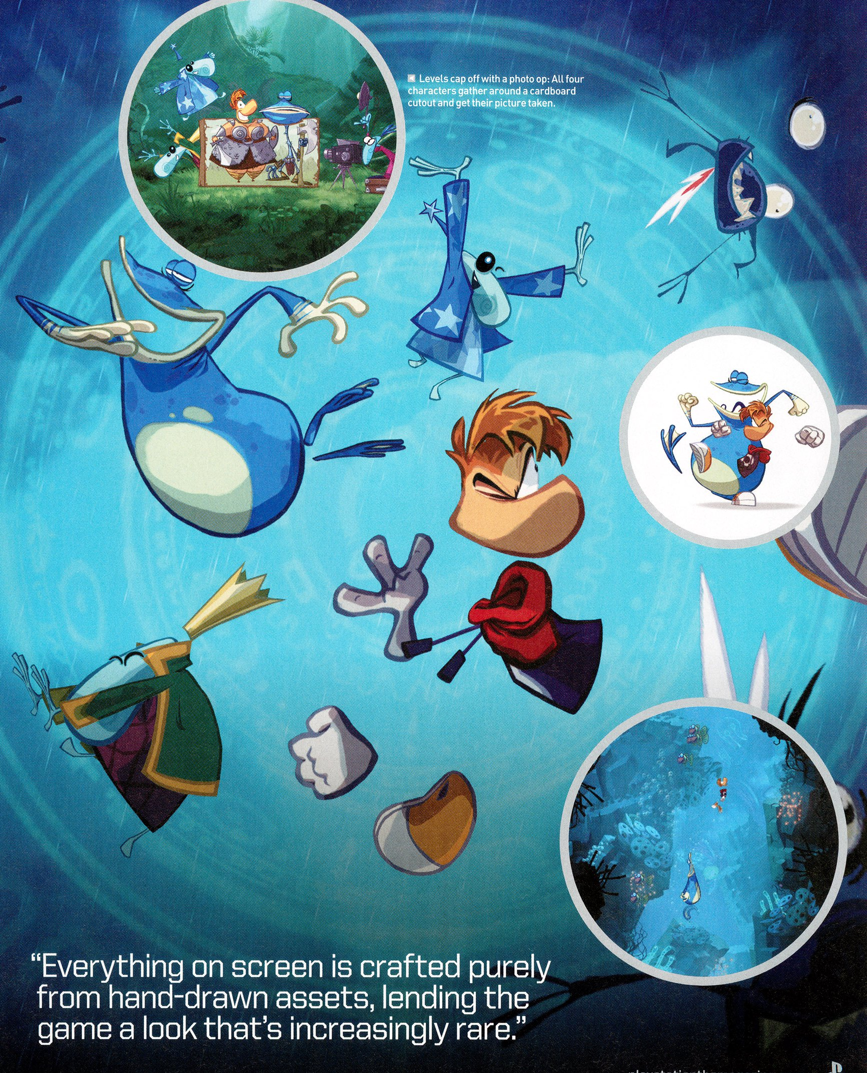
Rayman returns for what may be his most spectacular outing yet

When Ubisoft announced that series creator Michel Ancel had begun work on a new *Rayman* title, the company may not have realized just how deep the rabbit hole went. Ancel may have underestimated it as well; *Rayman Origins*, initially intended to be a downloadable PSN title, has since morphed into a 60-plus-level, side-scrolling opus, set for a fall release as a boxed retail product. "He just kept coming up with more and more characters, level designs, and ideas," says senior brand manager Michael Micholic of Ancel's enterprising creative spirit. "He's kind of got ADD...the scope of the project just continued to rise."

A look at the game in motion seems to corroborate this behavioral suspicion. From its layered backgrounds and energetic characters (Rayman himself has over 150 unique animations), the screen is absolutely bursting with illustration and movement. Everything on screen is crafted purely from hand-drawn assets, lending the game a look that's increasingly rare in the industry, and all but non-existent for titles with this level of scope and production value. Technically, *Origins* makes use of Ubisoft's UbiArt Framework, a host of development tools that have been created alongside the game itself, and which have allowed the developer to experiment with the presentation of the world. Micholic points to the layered environments deep in the background, which often contain just as much action as the foreground. Combined with 1080p fidelity and creative depth-of-field effects, the game has a look not unlike a top-quality animated feature film...back when 2D films were actually being made.

A brief jaunt through several of the game's levels reveals various mechanics at play. Each character can take to the air, using their own unique means: Rayman with his Hairlycopter, Globox by flapping his stubby arms, and the like. Many platforms must be actively "awakened" by the player before being climbed or bounced upon—further reinforcing the notion that this is a living, breathing world. An assortment of wind-up punch attacks also look like they've been plucked right out of a WB cartoon. When characters meet their untimely demise, they expand into ballooned versions of themselves, but can be brought back into the game by another character letting out their air and guiding them back down to earth.

With some 70 developers churning away inside a 16th century Victorian mansion in the south of France, the operation is anything but small. The game spans six worlds, ranging from lush jungles to dark, silhouetted graveyards to undersea reefs. Certain to become a fan favorite is the "food world," which is populated almost entirely by edible creatures and obstacles, ranging from slow-roasting chipotle peppers (think: a humanoid pepper relaxing in a sauna), pepper shakers, and farting beans. Sporting four-player "couch co-op" (read: no online multiplayer), this 2D glorious romp is sure to transport players back in time...in the best way possible.



Levels cap off with a photo op: All four characters gather around a cardboard cutout and get their picture taken.

“Everything on screen is crafted purely from hand-drawn assets, lending the game a look that’s increasingly rare.”

4

Searching for the sound

Elias Toufexis gets serious about the voice of Deus Ex: Human Revolution's Adam Jensen

What were some of the biggest challenges you encountered while voicing Adam Jensen?

Any TV show or film or videogame I do, the character has an arc. But with Jensen, the character's arc is dependent on what the player does, so I can't really make a decision on what kind of guy he is because by the end of the game, he's whatever the player decides. At the beginning it was hard to pin down a character for him because it's so reliant upon what the player does.

How would you describe Jensen's sound?

I played him so that whatever choice you make or he makes in the game, he's 100 percent behind it. You have millions of choices, but once you make that choice, I support that choice wholeheartedly in my performance of it. And let's be honest: I try to make him sound cool.

How do you get into character?

The first thing I do when I get a job is I want to see pictures—I want to see pictures of the world that I'm in. I definitely looked at the art and the world of *Deus Ex,* and I decided, "Okay, this is how I feel he should talk." Adam's serious, no matter what his choice is. I have to justify, as an actor, everything my character does, whether he's a good guy, a bad guy, whatever. I have to say, "Okay, this is why he's doing this."

Did you draw from any influences while developing his voice?

To be honest, not really. But it's funny—everybody thought that Christian Bale did the voice for a while, back when the trailer came out.

Having voiced all the lines for Jensen, how would you play the game? Stealthy, guns blazing, total badass, nice guy...?

I love stealth games. I would definitely do the stealth way. If I'm playing a good guy, I have to be good, so if I don't *have* to kill somebody I'm not going to kill them. I know that I'm going to be playing the game, trying not to kill anybody except the real bad guys and trying to stealth my way around without getting caught.

What do you hope to see from Human Revolution?

I just hope that people use it to its full advantage. In terms of the character, the thing that I hope the most is that I've left enough room for interpretation of the character that people can imprint their own personality on him.

Who is Elias Toufexis?

Born in Montreal, Canada, Elias Toufexis began his acting career in 2004. He's acted in TV shows such as *Smallville* and *Dead Like Me*, and has voice acted in games including *Splinter Cell: Conviction* and the *Assassin's Creed* series.

5 Mutants in Moscow

Metro: Last Light offers a murky worldview

Few post-apocalyptic shooters seem as relentlessly bleak as THQ's *Metro: Last Light*. That's due to its origins: This sequel to *Metro 2033*—due out sometime next year—is based on a novel by Russian author Dmitry Glukhovsky and is being developed by Ukrainian studio 4A Games. We chatted with Huw Beynon, 4A's head of studio communications, about *Last Light's* unique perspective.

How does the game reflect the development studio and the original book's author?

When developing fantastical or post-apocalyptic worlds, most western developers use a variety of cultural references for inspiration—be they film, books, or other games. But the view is likely to be one of a comfortable America or Western Europe, where life is relatively easygoing, and the post-apocalyptic world is imagined from the comfort of an easy chair. It's a very different view from the window of 4A Games' studio in Kiev, Ukraine. This is, after all, the country that endured the world's worst nuclear catastrophe, and many members of the studio, their friends, and their families have been affected by this legacy. And of course, *Metro's* world is based on the novel *Metro 2033*, by Glukhovsky. The Russians are infamous for their bleak outlook and black sense of humor.

Does this perspective filter through to the gameplay?

There's a real tendency for Eastern European development teams to lean toward complexity over simplicity—whether in gameplay mechanics or the subtleties of the narrative.

4A is meticulous in its attention to detail and its desire to deliver "realism"—so for example, you don't automatically suck up ammo when you run over a fallen weapon, you have to search and scavenge for it. If your torch runs out of juice, you have to manually re-charge it using a hand-held dynamo. Not all of these techniques work as gameplay devices, and a huge focus for the team is to balance the desire to add complexity with the need to keep the game accessible.

We believe there are gamers who want a more cerebral experience, and I think the success of games like *Half-Life*, *BioShock*, and *Portal* is testament to that. But we're not making a game for everyone—we're making the game we want to make, and it will be cerebral, it will be a slow-burner at times, it will have shades of gray. But I think there's an audience out there that wants *exactly* that from a game.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

▲ Forget the clunky helicopters of yore. These choppers can perform barrel rolls!

This time the story is being written by *New York Times* best-seller Jim DeFelice.

Battles take place in real-world locations, including sunny Miami and sunnier Dubai.

6 Chopper command

Narrative and helicopters join Ace Combat: Assault Horizon's fray

"We have a story." Nathan Stewart, director of brand marketing at Namco Bandai, is rattling off a litany of new features in *Ace Combat: Assault Horizon*, the latest in the long-running aerial franchise. And while story might not seem like a big deal in this age of cinematic action extravaganzas, it is for *Ace Combat*, which has long thrived with just a minimal whiff of a narrative backdrop. This time, however, the story is being written by *New York Times* best-seller Jim DeFelice, and it involves the pursuit of a bad guy known as "The Shark" across real-world settings (another first) in the near future.

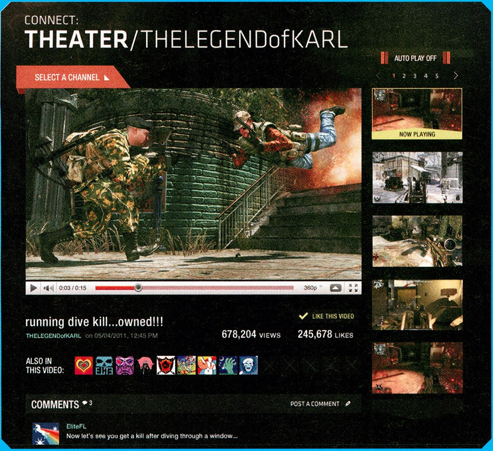
Also new: close-combat assault. Instead of blasting an anonymous pinprick from the distant skies, we can now engage in close-up one-on-one dogfights. During these encounters, our fighter jet is put on rails as we give chase through the skies, trying desperately to keep our foe in our sights. It's dizzying in practice, with both planes careening through the air, and a reticule that needs to be constantly adjusted to keep pace. (Dogfights are broken off, we're told, if we're unable to keep our foe within our target reticule.) After locking on for a long enough duration, we were able to launch a missile and blast our enemy from the skies, littering the air with debris and watching with glee as the enemy pilot ejected from his cockpit. It's fast-paced, intense, and eminently playable.

Best yet: there are new aircraft beyond the expected stable of fighter jets. The game includes bombers, gunships, helicopters (with door gunners), and more—all of which promise to "deliver new gameplay," says Stewart. We tested the helicopter and were impressed with how easily it controlled. In the level we played, we had to provide support to ground troops by eliminating threats from above while dodging RPG fire and other ordnance. The control scheme differs from the fighter jets, but proved to be an easy, intuitive adjustment. It's very much a modern shooter style of play, with the ability to lock on to targets using the familiar down-sights approach of other contemporary military gunners.

No word yet on multiplayer, other than the promise of "online reinvented," but if the single-player continues to impress as much as it did in our early playtest, we'll be looking to take off with *Assault Horizon* come this October.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about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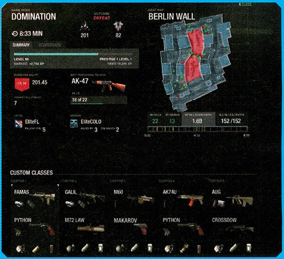
Now let's see you get a kill after diving through a window...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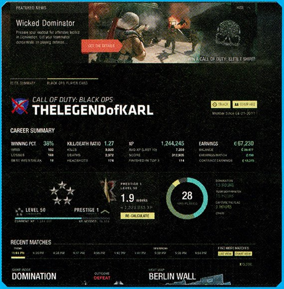
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XP 1,244,245
EARNINGS 67,230
LEVEL 50
PRESTIGE 1
1.9 weeks
RE-CALCULATE
28
RECENT MATCHES
DOMINATION
DEFEAT
BERLIN WALL

▲ We'll no longer need YouTube to share and celebrate our *COD* infamy.

7

Iron site

Call of Duty: Elite brings warfare everywhere

If there's one thing Activision is good at, it's doing the math. And, as expected, the publisher behind the *Call of Duty* franchise has crunched the numbers on its unstoppable military shooter. Over 30 million people have played a *COD* game in the past year. More than 20 million play online each month, with over 7 million playing every single day. That averages out to a whopping 170 hours of online play per *COD* gamer, according to Chacko Sonny, studio head at Beachhead.

So how best to capitalize on this dedicated fanbase? How best to expand the experience while bringing in some additional revenue? Enter Call of Duty: Elite, a new digital subscription service going into public beta this summer, with plans to launch later this year in conjunction with *Modern Warfare 3*. The goal is to, says Sonny, "Supercharge how we experience multiplayer in current and future [*COD* games]. That means: better ways to connect with friends, new ways to compete, and a rich range of tools to improve our game."

Pay to Play?

Using *COD: Black Ops*, we were shown a demo of Elite that displayed a highly granular recap of a match we'd just played, including everything from a heat map/timeline detailing every kill, stats about every gun used and their efficacy, and other minutiae all aimed at shedding light on every last detail of the battle. Other pages on the Elite site showcased the matchmaking services, including the ability to create and join groups based on any combination of personal interests; a calendar of events, including competitions (with real-world prizes) that ranged from one-off skill-based matches to month-long challenges based on secondary goals (like capturing the best screenshot or getting the most headshots); and an astoundingly robust set of teaching tools, including maps, weapons breakdowns, tips, videos, and more. Elite also supports private clans, along with group vs. group, clan vs. clan, intra-clan and league competitions, and is also accessible in-game, on the Web, and via mobile devices.

Pricing has yet to be revealed, but Activision promised it will be less than any comparable online gaming service; membership also includes full access to any DLC, including all available map packs. Meanwhile, standard multiplayer will remain free, and DLC will always be available a la carte for those not interested in subscribing to Elite.

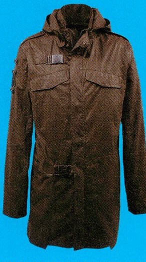
8 Solid style

Move over Lady Gaga, the next wave in fashion is coming from games

Which would you rather wear: a meat dress or Snake's field jacket? The answer, it seems to us, is obvious, and thanks to the fashionistas at Musterbrand it's easier than ever to emulate the look and style of gaming's hottest franchises. The recently formed company creates gaming-branded apparel that's available exclusively through online e-boutiques. These aren't gaudy, logo-emblazoned throwaway T-shirts we're speaking of, but rather high quality, tastefully understated clothing that reflect the aesthetics—rather than the marketing push—of our favorite games. Currently available collections include those based on Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* and Sony's *Gran Turismo*, with a cyberpunk-inspired line for Square Enix's *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* set to come later this year.

Metal Gear Solid
metalgearsolid-store.com

Gran Turismo
www.shop.us.gran-turismo.com



▲ A light drizzle stands no chance against the *Metal Gear Solid* Field Coat.

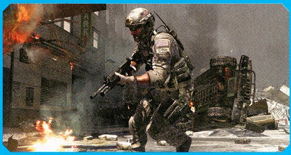
▲ The water resistant *Gran Turismo* Windbreaker looks stylish wet or dry.

▲ What could possibly be sexier than a *GT* t-shirt depicting a straight-six? Hmm... perhaps a V8.

▲ Military Olive *MGS* Field Pants offer a classic look, with extra pockets to hold all our...killing stuff.

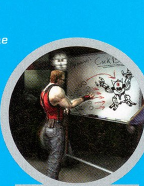
9 The Readers' Most Wanted

It's a double dose of modern combat, followed by a fellowship of fantasy offerings. *Modern Warfare 3* leads off the charts, again, for good reason. Flip ahead to our gameplay preview (p.32) to get a taste of why we're so excited about the latest chapter in this epic offering. Meanwhile, football makes a pre-season appearance—both pro and college—and Duke (not the college) makes what may be his final appearance...assuming the long-delayed game really, truly comes out this time.



01 *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*
02 *Battlefield 3*
03 *Final Fantasy XIII-2*
04 *Final Fantasy XIV*
05 *Madden NFL 12*
06 *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*
07 *Twisted Metal*
08 *Batman: Arkham City*
09 *Resistance 3*
10 *Need for Speed: The Run*
11 *BioShock Infinite*
12 *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*
13 *Mass Effect 3*
14 *Duke Nukem Forever*
15 *F.E.A.R. 3*
16 *Max Payne 3*
17 *NCAA Football 12*
18 *Ico / Shadow of the Colossus Collection*
19 *Dead Island*
20 *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*

MADDEN NFL 12



DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling period was May 1, 2011, to May 14, 2011.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

10

Is L.A. Noire better than Heavy Rain?

Both are game-changers. Which one is the very best?

Yes

Says the lady gumshoe

Anne Lewis

Do you know what I appreciate, Gary? Dynamic hand-to-hand combat. Voice actors with the appropriate accents. Not having to painstakingly fondle a button into the exact position so I can put a plate down on a table without being yelled at by my wife. I really don't think that's too much to ask for. No, I will not press X to *Jason*.

The superb acting and character-driven story leave me actually caring about what happens to the people of *L.A. Noire*, rather than shrugging apathetically as yet another tragedy strikes Ethan Mars. Not only did I give a damn about Phelps, I even got attached to his various partners. I'm sure I wasn't the only player with a bit of a crush on Stefan Bekowski. Who do I remember fondly from *Heavy Rain*? No one. All right, maybe Norman Jayden, but only because of his slick shades.

I'm sorry if political corruption, the dark and seedy criminal underground of 1940s Los Angeles, and immersive investigations appeal to me far more than living out a mixture of highly unbelievable sequences of events and mind-numbingly mundane tasks.

I will admit *L.A. Noire's* story takes a while to pick up, and *Heavy Rain* does have a deep, emotional narrative, but there is a plausibility in *L.A. Noire* that I just did not find in *Heavy Rain*. Both are highly ambitious titles; however, in my mind, *L.A. Noire* accomplished what it set out to do far better than its depressingly moist counterpart.

No

Says the inclement evaluator

Gary Steinman

Okay, fine. They're both great games. You know that, I know that, even *Anne* knows that. And yes, perhaps I can take the easy way out here by suggesting our plucky young intern can't fully grasp the gut-wrenching tale on offer in *Heavy Rain*—how she'd have to be a parent before she could fully feel what's going on in this somber story about the loss of one child and the kidnapping of another. But I'm not going there. Here's why.

Heavy Rain is a better game—if only slightly—because it nails the fun factor. Yes, friends, this melancholic, mopey, morbid experience is actually more enjoyable than *L.A. Noire*.

Think about it: *L.A. Noire*—despite its revolutionary graphics and impressive use of facial expressions—is the same thing over and over again. Watch a cutscene; head to the crime scene; chase down some clues; interrogate witnesses; chase down more clues; arrest the suspect. Again. And again. And again.

But *Heavy Rain* kept surprising me. That gripping driving sequence using only quick-time inputs. Or contorting my hand like a game of Twister in order to mimic Ethan's on-screen movements as he picked his way through an electrified maze. Even the small moments—like taking a swig of OJ straight from the carton—were just plain fun. And isn't that what games—even the most ambitious, innovative, philosophical ones—are all about?

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Zombies

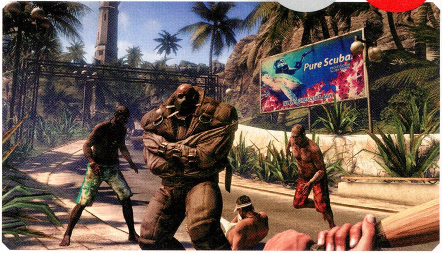
No longer a paradise, the island of Banoi is mysteriously overrun with the walking dead.

Humans

We play as a survivor of the outbreak, and can choose our hero from one of four.

Survival

We'll need to run, fight, and build weaponry if we're going to escape this *Dead Island* alive.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **September** Pub **Deep Silver** Dev **Techland**

Dead Island

Death takes a holiday

When speaking, broadly, on the matter of islands, a few stand out as notable: Skull Island, where Carl Denham stumbled upon the giant ape King Kong; Hermey's Island of Misfit Toys, where sad playthings go to languish and lament; and Gilligan's Island, a cautionary tale in which we learn never to bring the village idiot on a three-hour tour.

To these, we add *Dead Island*. The name, of course, is a misnomer, as the island is quite alive, albeit with the living dead. As a human survivor, we're a quickly dying breed. Hell has come to paradise on Earth, and our fondest wish is a one-way ticket off this once idyllic rock.

We can play as one of four characters in the first-person perspective and developer Techland has revealed three of the protagonists to date. The first, Sam B., is a washed-up rap star, crooning his one-hit, "Who Do You Voodoo, Bitch?" in the resort's lounge when the zombie plague strikes. Xian Mei, a female receptionist, has been described as an assassin character; she certainly seems adept at using weaponry, and confidently bleats out, "I set you free!" and "I hope that hurt!" when she dispatches zombies. The third, Logan, is a former football star with, not surprisingly, a checkered past. Each character, of course, has their own storyline and, more importantly, a personalized Rage mode ability.

Dawn, Day, and Night

It's like a giant buffet table, Banoi. The population is decimated, but we survive and stumble outside of the Royal Palm resort to discover the cruel mistress, fate, has taken a bowel movement on us. It's time for fight *and* flight.

We can pick up stuff in the environment: pipes, boards, paddles, knives. Later, we'll be able to find guns, but these are scarce and ammunition is limited. Further, *Dead Island* sets up a scenario in which we'll be forever scrounging for weapons as they deteriorate with use. This means boards shatter, knives become dull, and guns lose their pop.

Workbenches scattered around the island can be put to great use. These are reminiscent of those found in Capcom's *Dead Rising 2*, but are more functional. Here, we can repair broken weapons, upgrade them, and even combine items to create more powerful zombie killers. In our brief

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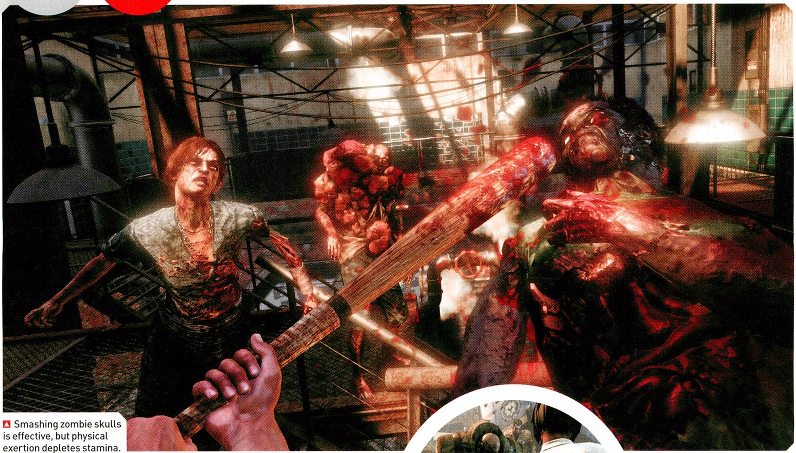


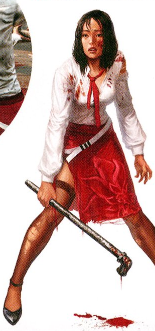
Smashing zombie skulls is effective, but physical exertion depletes stamina.

playtest, we experimented with electricity, juicing up knives and machetes to deliver a high-voltage beatdown to enemies.

Survivors, too, can be found around the island, gathered together in small enclaves for safety. We can talk to these people to learn more about the island and, oftentimes, they'll have tasks for us to perform. These will open new paths for us, give us access to new weapons, and allow us to gain experience that, in turn, helps us to become a deadlier killer.

In our demo we meet Dominic, who puts us on to an antennae amplifier that, certainly, will not fix itself. We're to find a lighthouse, another human-held stronghold, to see if we can't find one there, with the game graciously pointing us along the way on the mini-map. We're prompted to follow a white line, a breadcrumb trail that will lead us to our destination. On an island as big and distraction-filled as Banoi, this trail—like any good concierge—is a godsend.

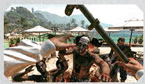
Along the way, we can undertake side missions. Zombies have trapped a luckless soul inside a car and we could rescue him. Instead, we opt to hightail it to the lighthouse as quickly as we can. Had we rescued the poor soul, we would have been rewarded. One human hand, it must be noted,



Receptionists, like Xian Mei, may seem all sunshine, lollipops, and rainbows, but they possess a vicious survival instinct.

Armed and Dangerous on Dead Island

A few good whacks
Weapons decay. This machete is only good for a few more whacks.



This is not a (Pipe) weapon
This pipe makes a poor weapon, but we have to use what's handy.

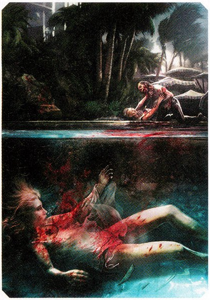
Reuse and repair
Luckily, we can use workbenches to upgrade and repair weapons.

Reborn
Our machete, once chipped and dented, is made new again.

Innovate
Tinkering yields great results, like the electrified machete.

Look for opportunities to dispatch maximum undead with minimum ammo.

Look for the occasional oasis in the sea of undead inhabited by pockets of survivors. Speak to everyone to discover side missions and what lies at the heart of Banoi's zombie invasion.



Here's a one-way ticket to a better place—no reservations necessary.

"As we progress, the zombies will become more nimble, speedier, and take alternate forms."

washes another in this particular zombie hellhole.

Zombies persistently accost us as we traverse a narrow road. Initially, all our attackers will be slow and shambling, the sort of undead made famous by director George Romero's creepy black-and-white opus *Night of the Living Dead*. As we progress, the zombies will become more nimble, speedier, and take alternate forms such as exploding Suiciders and the ghastly poisoned zombies, who are bathed in an appropriately ominous green funk.

We can huck weapons at foes and also objects, and this comes in handy when we find explodable propane tanks. Otherwise, depending on the weapon type, we'll have to bludgeon or cut our way through foes. Our heroes can dash away from an assault, but this drains our stamina, leaving us weakened and vulnerable.

In this particular case, we say to hell with running. Nearby, there's a functioning car. We hop into it and begin driving away. We detour only briefly to introduce some zombies to our front bumper.

City Living

Later, we'll get to tear through a city. It's been thoroughly looted and, as *Island's* brand manager Vincent Kummer says, is considerably darker than the game's beachfront scenes.

Here, we'll face a snorting behemoth in a straitjacket whose sprinting attacks are deadly. We need, in fine videogame fashion, to sidestep his attacks, ensuring he'll slam into a wall and disorient himself. Then, and only then, can we strike back.

Do answers await in the city? Certainly, *Island* asks us to consider just what, exactly, the hell is going on here. We're out to survive, but make no mistake, we also want to know who's responsible for ruining our vacation. He has a severe throttling coming.

GREG ORLANDO

Dev Talk

"[Dead Island] is not going to be one of the easiest games out there."

Vincent Kummer
Brand Manager

A LEGEND REBORN.
A LEGION UNITED.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

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FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **November** Pub **Activision** Dev **Infinity Ward / Sledgehammer**

Call of Duty Modern Warfare 3

There goes the neighborhood...

New York is a wasteland. And no, we're not talking about the latest culture wars, the mortgage market meltdown, or any other social, financial, or political happenings. We're talking about soldier-on-soldier, tank-on-tank, helicopter-on-helicopter, knock-down, drag-out brawling, complete with heavy ordnance and absolutely no care for maintaining Manhattan's grandeur. And it's up to us, as part of Delta Team, to continue this rampant wave of destruction to repel the Russians from our beloved home front.

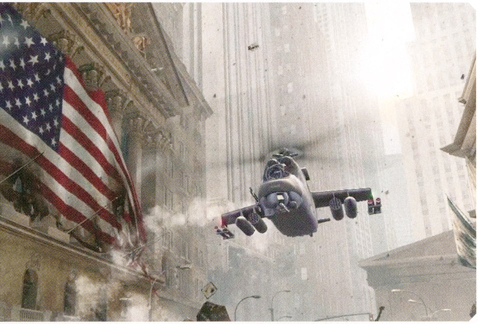
This is *Modern Warfare 3*, and it is spectacular.

Set right after the events of *Modern Warfare 2*, the November release promises epic battles across the globe: in New York, London, France, Germany, Africa, the Himalayas. This is pitched, noisy, and cinematic modern combat. And while it's exactly what we expected from the latest entry in the blockbuster franchise, it still grips us nonetheless.

In our demo, we witnessed two levels in action. The first—titled Black Tuesday—is a non-stop frenzy of firefights in New York's financial district. The goal: to fight our way to the roof of the Stock Exchange building, in order to disable a communication jamming system. While punching through the canyons framed out by gray stone buildings and sleek skyscrapers, our soldiers dart from cover to cover: some natural, like the newsstands, hot dog carts, and overturned cars littering the streets; others man-made, such as the craters and building debris left from bombs and tanks. Bullets whiz by, helicopters whirr overhead, and car alarms lend their pointless wail to the din. It's

Totally Tubular The London underground gets the Modern Warfare treatment

No need to pony up for subway fare. Grab a jeep and start shooting while riding the rails. Just watch out for oncoming trains!



We can't help it. Seeing our flag flying in defiance of the Russian invasion—it's motivation enough to keep us dodging bullets while charging forward.

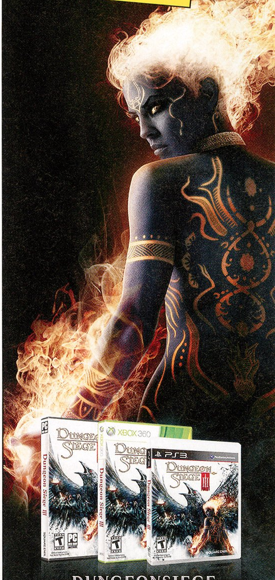
Soldier-on-soldier, tank-on-tank, helicopter-on-helicopter brawling

pulse-pounding combat, with the soldiers ducking into and out of buildings, close-quarter firefights among the counters of a department store, up and down staircases and into adjacent buildings, all pushing toward that giant U.S. flag adorning the Stock Exchange building.

Once inside, it's a push to the roof, leaping across scaffolding while firing away amid the still-blinking monitors and stock tickers. After reaching the roof, the demo finishes with a dizzying helicopter battle (our extraction, after disabling the jammer)—a clash set amongst skyscrapers, culminating in a collision that almost sends us to our deaths below, leaving us breathless and disoriented as our soldiers barely right the copter and fly off to their next mission.

Next, we saw Mind the Gap, slower in pace and set in London. On the docks at night, our soldiers crept through rainy alleyways, with stealth taking priority until, predictably, our cover is blown. What followed was a series of firefights through warehouses and construction yards—typical enough, but the capper was a thrilling chase through the London tubes, our jeep pursuing a subway car, avoiding oncoming trains, sparks flying everywhere, explosions illuminating the darkened underground.

While much has yet to be revealed about the multiplayer and cooperative modes, the single-player campaign is already on track to deliver the cinematic action experience that has defined *Modern Warfare* since it first invaded our PS3s. GARY STEINMAN



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HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Q1 2012** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Square Enix**

Final Fantasy XIII-2

Because even sequels need their own sequels

With its release date quickly approaching, Square Enix has shown us a bit of what's to come in the latest chapter of the *Final Fantasy* saga. And while it doesn't deviate too far from the formula set in *Final Fantasy XIII*, a handful of updated systems and original characters are on display.

Perhaps most interesting is the variety of combat mechanics. Every time a monster attacks, our Feral bar gets filled; when full, this triggers a cinematic action sequence. When prompted, successfully hitting a button or moving the analog stick in a particular direction temporarily bumps our combat efficiency. Functioning like mid-battle quick-time events, these sequences proved essential during tougher boss battles. Likewise, when a battle is about to begin, a dial will appear on the floor; when it pops up, we had a limited window of time in which to engage the enemy in order to perform a preemptive strike. Finally, weather (such as the rain shown in our playable demo) will also have an elemental effect in combat.

In our demo, we were on the hunt for Atlus in an area called Bresha Ruins. Enter new character Noel along with returning star Serah, who together have agreed to help rid this excavation site of an otherworldly monstrosity. The landscape here is littered with NPCs, but our focus is on the big fella: Coming through a dimensional portal, we initially only see Atlus' enormous metallic arm stretching through the rift. Like the game itself, it's merely a hint of what's to come, both here and on the other side. **EVAN SHAMOON**

Meet Noel, a mysterious new character who joins Serah and a menagerie of collectible monsters.

Live Trigger events are cinematics set elsewhere, followed by a choice that can affect what happens later.

ocused on dealing damage
12
19
Serah
Noel

u can fight, can't you?

After defeating an enemy, we can collect a glowing crystal that represents the monster. Snag it and the monster is now in our party.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Spring 2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **LightBox Interactive**

Starhawk

Expanding the final frontier

If burritos and the Earth's crust have taught us anything, it's that everything is better with layers. Such is the case with *Starhawk*—the follow-up to the multiplayer third-person shooter *Warhawk* that adds aerial combat and streamlined real-time strategy elements.

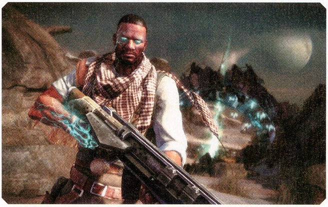
At first, the slick control scheme seemed like most any other shooter—hit Square to reload, hold L1 to aim down sight—but the Triangle button is a radial Building Select menu with a variety of military installations that we placed freely around the battlefield.

Thankfully, there's no micromanagement of any of these buildings (nor the units spawned from them). Instead, we sat back and felt satisfied as our turrets and ally soldiers tore through enemy troops for us. At times we worried that we were randomly building, but the heads-up display indicates the time, location, and unit type of the next enemy wave, making it easier to plunk down effective defensives.

Even without the RTS elements, the fast-paced run-and-gun combat is strong. A cooperative over-the-shoulder camera, generous health regeneration, and dramatic slo-mo explosions and headshots lend the action an accessible, arcade-like quality.

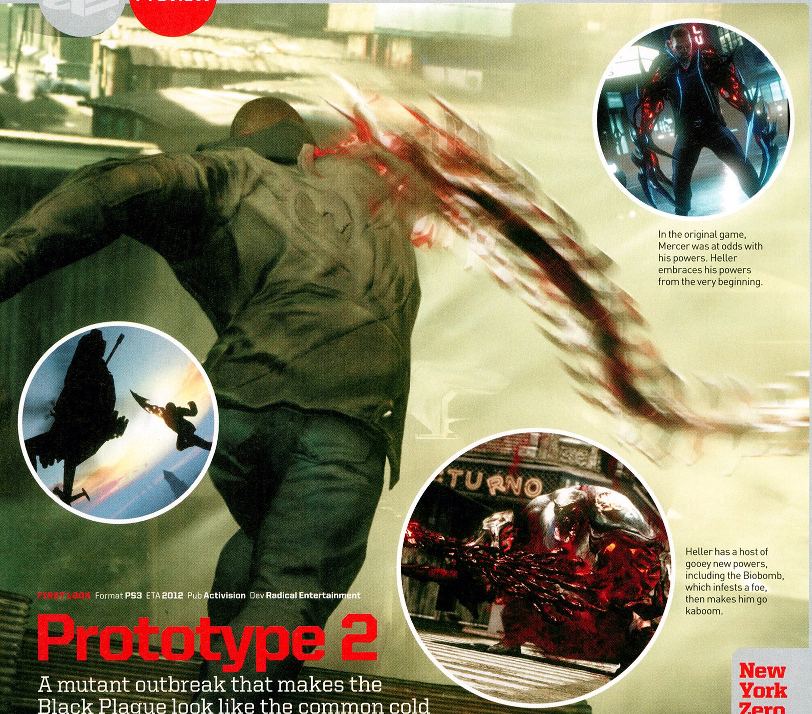
But the most impressive part of the demo was when we stepped into the cockpit of a Hawk, which, unlike a Warhawk, can transform from a mech-like ground vehicle to a nimble airship. The flight controls felt natural, with a variety of maneuvers mapped to the right stick. It was like playing *Warhawk*, but with a whole other dimension, waiting on the ground beneath us.

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH



Protagonist Emmett Graves instructs his partner in orbit where to drop each installation...like right on top of an enemy Hawk.

Objects in *Starhawk* are highly destructible, meaning unprotected buildings will eventually be destroyed.



In the original game, Mercer was at odds with his powers. Heller embraces his powers from the very beginning.

Heller has a host of gooey new powers, including the Biobomb, which infests a foe, then makes him go kaboom.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **Activision** Dev **Radical Entertainment**

Prototype 2

A mutant outbreak that makes the Black Plague look like the common cold

In its own words, Vancouver's Radical Entertainment has a simple goal with *Prototype 2*: namely, to create the "ultimate power fantasy." Rough day at work? Trouble communicating with your significant other? Jump into *Prototype 2*, scale the side of a Manhattan skyscraper, rip an enemy chopper from mid-air and tear it in half...and just like that, everything will seem fine.

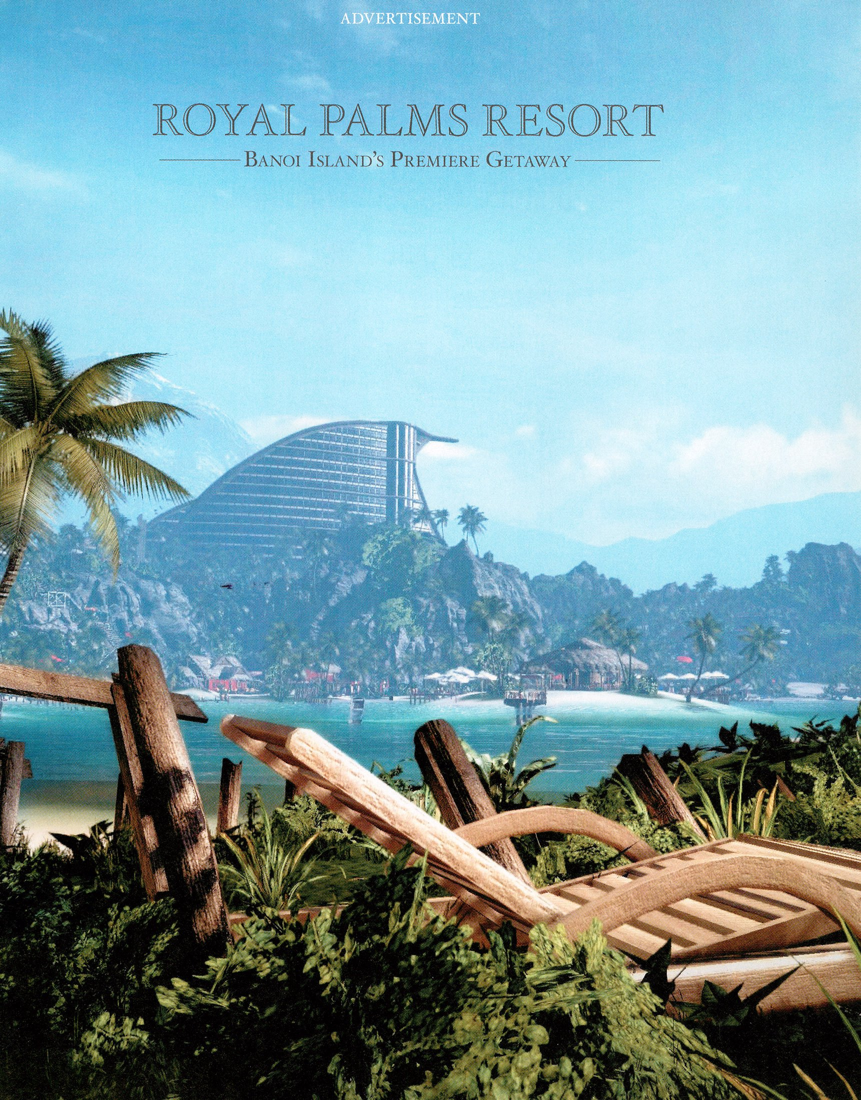
Players take the reins of Sgt. Joseph Heller, back from tours in Iraq and hell-bent on tracking down Alex Mercer, the original game's protagonist-cum-evil-incarnate. While the game will have its share of story twists and turns (the paramilitary organization BlackWatch is back for seconds), the focus is on this inevitable confrontation.

Added emphasis has also been placed upon empowering the player. "The ways in which you can string things up, tear them apart, or slam them into each other is unbelievably fun and never seems to get old," says Radical's design director Matt Armstrong. "I've lost count of the number of times that I've begun playing the game intent on testing out a particular mission or feature and got totally distracted using my tendrils to create carnage and chaos out in the open world."

Indeed, refining the emergent, open-world gameplay has been a key focus for the team. "Probably the biggest challenge has been giving the player more control over combat without losing the over-the-top chaos of [*Prototype's*] enormous battles," says Armstrong. **EVAN SHAMOON**

New York Zero

Fourteen months after the first game's viral outbreak, New York City has changed beyond recognition. Now called New York Zero, the city is a shell of its former self. Manhattan has been rebranded by the military as the Red Zone, and enormous viral growth has turned parts of that once-proud borough into a literal urban jungle.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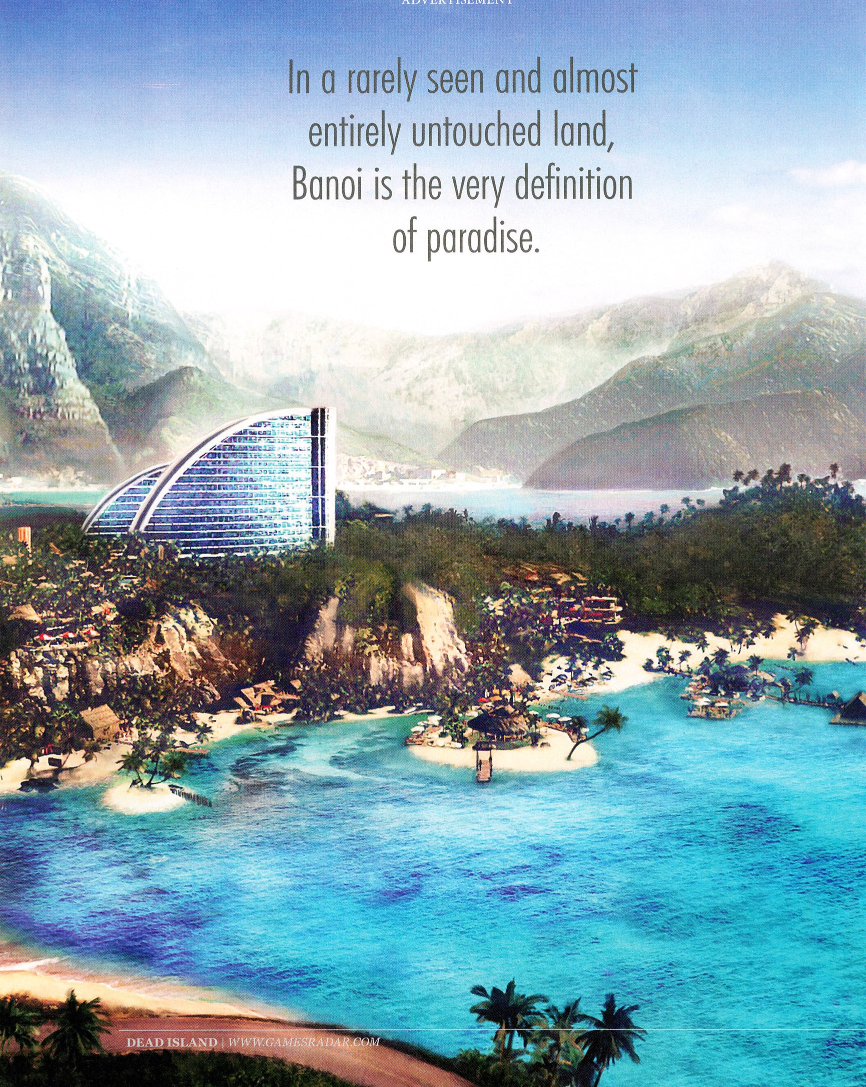
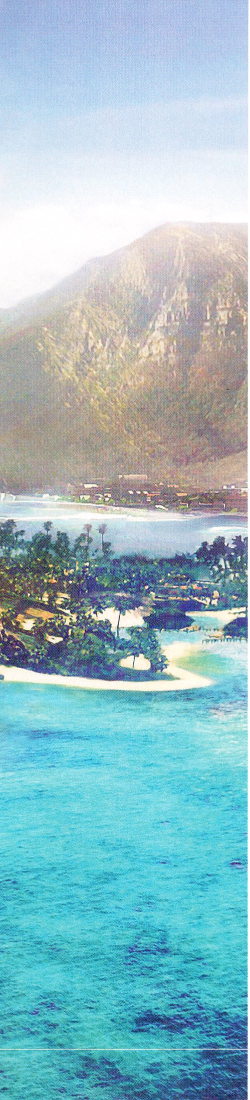
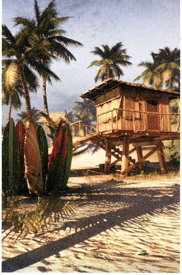
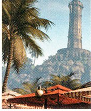


In a rarely seen and almost
entirely untouched land,
Banoi is the very definition
of paradise.







LUXURY

Immerse yourself in the lush tropical destination that is Banoi Island. The white sandy beaches and endless blue skies set the stage for what will be the most memorable time of your life.

Banoi Island, housed in the tropical Papua New Guinea region, is an ideal getaway for the most exclusive travelers. In a rarely seen and almost entirely untouched land, Banoi is the very definition of paradise. The pristine reefs and the warm, clear water make it every diver's dream. New to diving? Don't worry about a thing. Our on-site teaching staff will show you the ropes while our highly trained lifeguards keep you safe.

When you've finished exploring the waters of Banoi, take a walk through the jungles teeming with exotic wildlife. And thanks to the virgin landscape, these majestic jungles reach from the coast all the way up to the mountains, which provide breathtaking views of the entire island.

Prefer to just go easy and take the weight of the world off your shoulders? Spend some time in our magnificent five-star hotel. Stylish bungalows located around the swimming pools, and fully stocked bars are your second home and always open to all of our guests. Suites that are worthy of royalty, and spacious rooms with breathtaking views are just a short elevator ride away.

Our highly trained cleaning crew uses the most modern tools to make sure that the hotel's campus is clean, tidy and clear of clutter at all times. Don't even spend a second worrying about the pool, the lobby, or even your room. Even the landscape surrounding the hotel is perfectly manicured to make sure that your arrival, stay and departure is as easy as can be.

So do yourself a favor, and kick back, relax, and enjoy all that Banoi has to offer. The huge island is yours to explore whenever you please, and will keep you and your loved ones engaged in all types of activities only made better by the fact that you're surrounded by the people that made the island so great to begin with.

ENTERTAINMENT

So you've spent about as much time as you possibly can enjoying the lush surroundings, and want to get your hands dirty? Sign up for one of our workshops! With our on-site classes you can learn how to build a spice rack, hit a home run, or even enhance your chi!

01

Get your hands dirty!

Building has always been a secret passion of yours, but the trials and tribulations of your job have made it all but impossible to find the time to learn how to even properly hammer a nail, huh? Do yourself a favor, and sign up for our many woodworking and metalworking classes! We've got all the tools and workbenches on hand to help you unleash your inner crafter. Sign up today to ensure that we'll have room for you, and we can teach you how to make anything from a stylish necklace to a baseball bat.

02

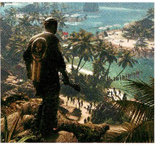
Practice your swing!

While hiking and traveling around Banoi Island is an excellent source of physical activity, you may want to spend some of your time practicing your hockey, golf or baseball swing. And you know what? There are plenty of opportunities to make that happen! Our on-site gear includes baseball bats, golf clubs, hockey sticks and tons of other sporting equipment. If you're interested in honing your sports skills, we can provide all the necessary tools to do so.

03

Be at peace!

The hustle and bustle of everyday life can leave you feeling in complete disarray. It's for this very reason that we, as the complete getaway destination, offer martial arts classes aimed at allowing you to center your chi and feel at peace. Whether you're looking to become proficient in hand-to-hand combat or you simply wish to learn advanced relaxation techniques, we can offer you the means to learn it. Become one with yourself, and the beauty that Banoi has to offer.



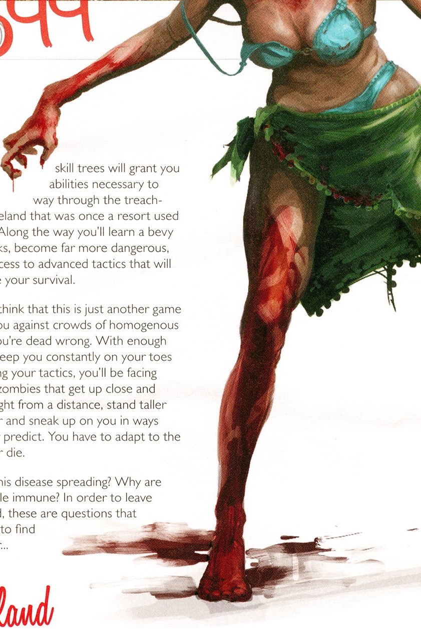
01
02
03

Don't come to Dead Island

650-238-2599

DEAD ISLAND

Say goodbye to Banoi Island. Its days are over, now you're on Dead Island.



You're just a guest at the Royal Palms Resort on the vacation of a lifetime... or so you thought. After a couple short days of pure paradise the world seems to come to an end. People are changing and they attack anything that moves, infecting them with an aggressive, fast-acting disease. The only emotion left in those that are afflicted with it is aggression, and it spreads like wildfire. Only a handful of survivors are left, and you're one of them.

You'll find yourself under constant attack from a seemingly endless supply of shambling, bloodthirsty zombies. Use items found all over the island coupled with appropriate blueprints, and you'll be able to build special versions of weapons found during your adventures. Start by attaching a battery to a machete for extra damage (among many other deadly combinations), and you'll be stunning, poisoning or blowing up every walking corpse that's unlucky enough to cross your path.

Worried that you won't be able to keep up with the sheer number of foes you'll be facing? Worry not, for the leveling system and deep skill trees will grant you all the abilities necessary to work your way through the treacherous wasteland that was once a resort used by royalty. Along the way you'll learn a bevy of new tricks, become far more dangerous, and gain access to advanced tactics that will help ensure your survival.

And if you think that this is just another game that puts you against crowds of homogenous zombies, you're dead wrong. With enough variety to keep you constantly on your toes and changing your tactics, you'll be facing off against zombies that get up close and personal, fight from a distance, stand taller a linebacker and sneak up on you in ways you'll never predict. You have to adapt to the situation, or die.

So why is this disease spreading? Why are some people immune? In order to leave Dead Island, these are questions that you'll need to find answers for...

www.gamesradar.com/deadisland

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.

DEAD ISLAND

DEEP SILVER

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **Activision** Dev **Silicon Knights**

X-Men Destiny

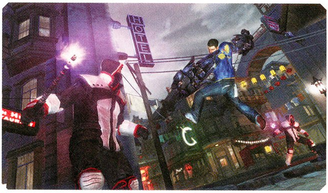
Choose your own mutation

While not exactly Marvel's answer to *DC Universe Online*, *X-Men: Destiny* gives us a chance to customize our own personal X-Man and choose a side in the mutant race war.

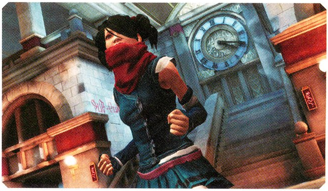
Players pick one of three newly minted mutants—Japanese schoolgirl Aimi, all-American athlete Grant, or defiant rich kid Adrian—and any one of three core powers. As the game progresses, that core power can be augmented with offensive, defensive, and utilitarian upgrades borrowed directly from existing Marvel characters' special abilities. Want Surge's electrical attacks, Colossus' size, and Quicksilver's speed? Collect their X-Genes while exploring *Destiny's* near-future San Francisco and mix-and-match to create unique combinations.

Our early demo didn't show much of the game's RPG elements, but it did display the somewhat standard two-button beat-'em-up combat and "kill X number of enemies to progress" style of gameplay. Mixing light and heavy attacks produced fireworks of goon-pummeling energy that later helped defeat super villain Sublime—who dosed himself with a handful of X-Genes—in a multi-part boss battle. This left us with a binary moral choice: Aid the X-Men or help Magneto's mutant brotherhood? Be prepared to team up with a roster of iconic Marvel characters either way.

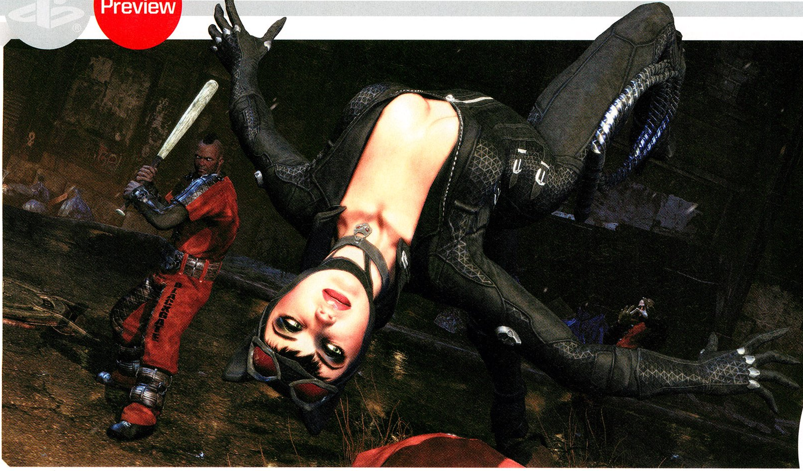
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH



Pretty soon, this goon will be gushing some combination of health, power, or experience orbs. *Cha-ching!*



No word yet on whether *Destiny's* three young mutants will ever appear in the comics, but consider this their origin story.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **October** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.** Dev **Rockstead Studios**

Batman Arkham City

Rocksteady lets the cat out of the bag

It's a burden, being Batman. Carrying the weight of Gotham City's unending problems on his costumed shoulders; tussling with an ever-growing rogues gallery of psychotic, superpowered villains. That—along with the sleep deprivation—could get to a guy. What to do?

"Sometimes as a gamer, there's a desire to walk on the wild side," says Dax Ginn, marketing game manager at Rocksteady Studios. "To take a break. If you feel that way..."

Ginn pauses. He smiles. Then he offers up the next big reveal in this open-world superhero adventure: Catwoman—fully playable, with her own story arc that intersects with the main Batman storyline.

Triggered at key moments throughout the game, we'll be given the option to step into the tights of Selena Kyle's alter ego. It's a bit easy, perhaps, to describe her moves as *feral*, but she undeniably resembles a cat in motion, crouching down on all fours to scurry across rooftops, using her whip to pounce across gaps, her claws to scrabble up walls. Where Batman is about power, Catwoman is about intimacy: she's connected to the world, lower to the surfaces.

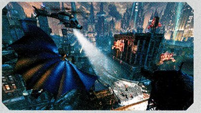
Catwoman is also weaker. She has a Thief mode that will highlight items worth stealing, but that's about it.

City Litter

Arkham City's a slum area of Gotham that's been walled-off and converted into a prison. The baddies roam free here—the perfect setting for a cat burglar who targets crooks.

The Hook Everything is bigger in Arkham City, including Batman's abilities

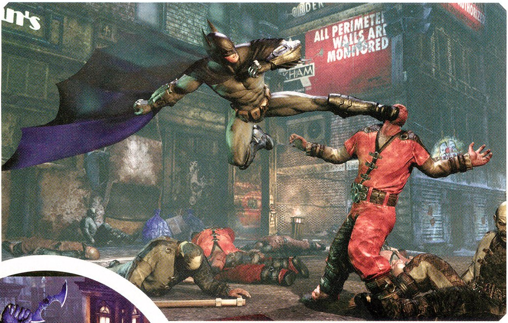
We begin the game with every gadget from *Arkham Asylum*, but most of them have been tweaked to fit the new setting. Batman's climbing and multitasking have also been improved (he can now use certain gadgets while running). He also has a bigger rogues gallery.



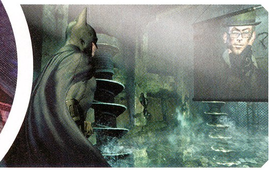
The frequency scanner can now find radio messages from anywhere in the city.

Improved context-sensitive attacks make combat even more fun.

Villains include: Two-Face, The Joker, Mr. Freeze, Talia Al Ghul, Penguin, and more.



Ain't that a kick in the face.



So she must rely on her gadgetry and stealth to take down foes—often the same baddies that Batman would face, since her goal is to re-steal high-value goods from other crooks. To her advantage, though: She can climb across certain ceilings—which we saw in her raid of a subterranean area awash with goons—then drop down and squeeze the consciousness out of an unwitting criminal using her lovely legs.

Catwoman won't have equal time with Batman; he's still the star of this epic adventure. Instead, Catwoman's missions represent only about 10 percent of the entire game, and there are certain Riddler trophies that only she can get.

Riddle Me That

Speaking of the Riddler, his challenges have also grown. No longer are they simply hunts for hidden icons, but they now include specific challenge rooms. In the one we played, Batman had to save a prisoner's life using both his brains and quick reflexes, moving quickly from safe point to safe point along an electrified floor while dodging a spiked log that rolled overhead. The most challenging part of this room: using Batman's Grapnel Gun to sweep across the ceilings. New to *Arkham City*: Batman can now shoot another rope while sliding along his current one. It's a tricky maneuver that took some practice, but skilled players should be able to remain air-bound for much longer periods.

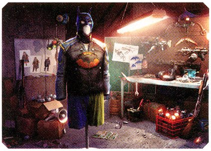
It's all part of Rocksteady's goal to make *City* bigger and better than *Arkham Asylum*. With an open-world setting five times larger than the original, enhanced combat that includes navigational moves (take down a goon straight from a grapnel across rooftops), and environmental awareness (slam a foe into a nearby wall), *Arkham City* may own the night come October. GARY STEINMAN

Dev Talk

"We definitely had a lot of feedback about the detective side, and we've heard that loud and clear. We've changed it so it can't be used as an exploit—you know, keeping it on all the time. If you turn it on you see the pertinent things, but other than that there's little detail, so there's no great advantage from just playing in Detective mode. But the forensic side of Batman is really important to us. He's the world's greatest detective, it's a core part of who he is and something we wanted to nail."

Dax Ginn
Marketing Game Manager
Rocksteady Studios

Could Be a Contender



Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2011**
Pub **Warner Bros. Int. Ent.** Dev **Monolith**

Gotham City Impostors

Bat-fans and Jokesters

The premise
Not everyone can be Batman. And not everyone can be the Joker. So how to make a multiplayer game starring the two? Try cosplaying. With guns!

The reality
Impostors is an over-the-top multiplayer shooter, with customizable characters and weapons, set in a cartoony Gotham City, pitting the Bats against the Jokerz—amateur vigilantes and evil-doers who face off against each other.

The hook
When DC's Jim Lee saw the game, his advice was to "take it further." The result (thus far) is wacky and wackier.

The chances
Monolith knows multiplayer shooters, and this one comes with a utility belt full of nifty gadgets, weapons, and special abilities. It's not quite the fantasy fulfillment of being Batman himself, but it's an intriguing way to handle multiplayer in Gotham.

MATURE 17+
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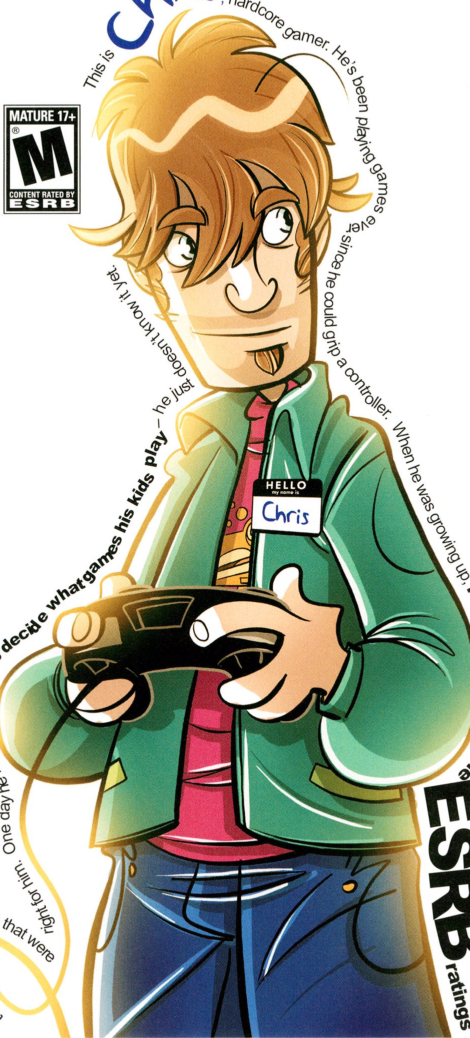
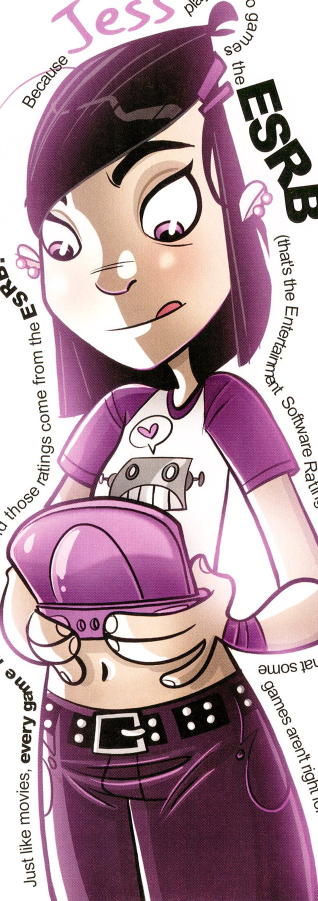
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB



This is **Chris**, hardcore gamer. He's been playing games ever since he could grip a controller. When he was growing up, **his parents used the ESRB ratings** to choose the games that were right for him. One day he'll use the ratings to **decide what games his kids play** – he just doesn't know it yet.

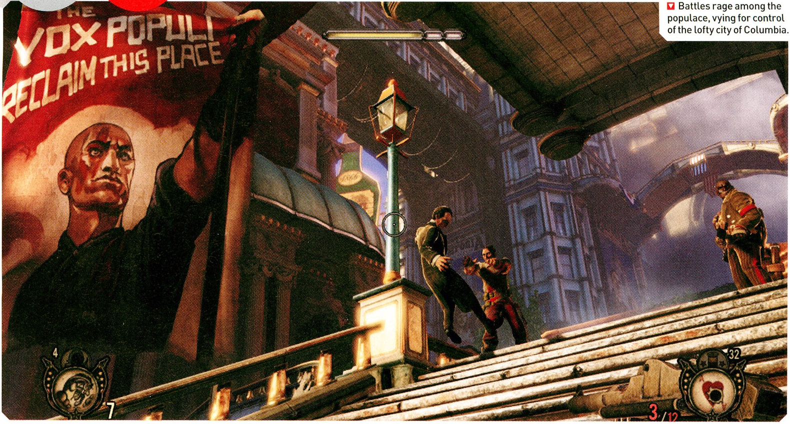
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB



Because **Jess** plays video games the **ESRB** (that's the Entertainment Software Rating Board) **understands** that some games aren't right for everyone.

Just like movies, **every game has a rating.** And those ratings come from the **ESRB.**

www.ESRB.org

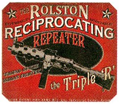


Battles rage among the populace, vying for control of the lofty city of Columbia.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Irrational Games**

BioShock Infinite

For Irrational, the sky's not even close to the limit



They had us at hello.

Our *BioShock Infinite* demo begins inside a large souvenir shop. Booker DeWitt, the game's protagonist, has found a girl named Elizabeth and now they're on the run. As the two sift through the store's dusty inventory, the dynamic between them begins to come clear. "Gold! Look, Booker!" Elizabeth quips, grabbing a cheap, gold-painted bust from the piles. Moments later, she finds an oversized Abe Lincoln head, which she places on hers before reciting the Gettysburg Address. It's fairly mundane stuff, but sheds some light: Elizabeth has been held hostage inside a tower her entire life, and in her newfound freedom is acting like a kid in a candy store.

Still in the store, Booker comes across a gun, just before the eye of an enormous beast can be seen peering in through the building's windows. Their pursuer, known as Songbird, takes many forms, and there's nothing friendly about this one. "He's her jailer. Her only friend," says creative director Ken Levine. "He's got one job in the world once you bust Elizabeth out: To find her and bring her back to her tower."

Oh, and there's another thing worth pointing out about Liz: She has the ability to open tears in the space-time continuum, letting her bring objects from other realities into her own. This is demonstrated for us shortly after leaving the shop; tempting fate, we head toward Comstock House, home of a nationalist organization called the Founders, who created the floating city of Columbia. On the way, we come across a fatally injured horse; though we're given the option to euthanize it with our pistol, Elizabeth senses a tear and attempts to tap into it in order to save its life. "I can control it this time," she screams, just before losing her grip. After some hearty glitches in the fabric of time, the two suddenly find themselves in middle of a street next to a healthy horse, many years into the future (as evidenced by the movie theater across the street showing *Revenge of the Jedi*). Booker implores her to close the tear—which she does, a split second before a fire truck barrels them over. It's just one of the many remarkable moments we see today. (Alternatively, we could have simply shot the poor horse. But where's the fun in that?)

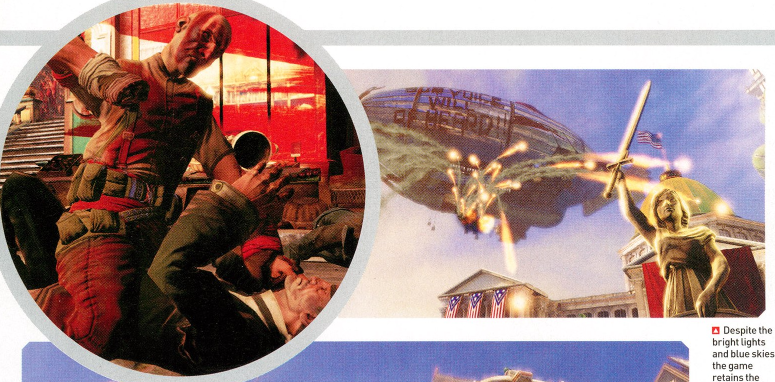
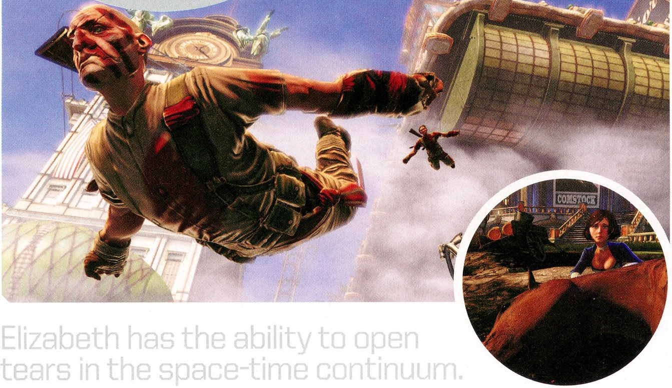
Air Up There

As the pair moves into the city, the environment becomes more populated and the atmosphere noticeably more aggressive. Massive propaganda posters adorn the walls, and all around us men are being beaten and thrown through windows. At the heart of the disturbance, we learn, is

Infinite Sky-lines

No ticket necessary

Booker, his enemies, and even Elizabeth can use *Infinite's* Sky-lines. Once latched on (using a handheld hook), a small circle indicates our landing spot on either the ground or another Sky-line we pass mid-trip. As we ride, we're able to fire weapons at other enemies (on Sky-lines or otherwise). And how's this for a showstopper: Elizabeth can close a tear and remove a Sky-line, sending enemies falling to their deaths. "We want Elizabeth to be an important part of combat strategy," says Levine. "This system we evolved, you come into a combat space, and there's a bunch of opportunities to open a tear or close a tear."

Despite the bright lights and blue skies, the game retains the ominous sense of dread of its predecessors.

Elizabeth has the ability to open tears in the space-time continuum.

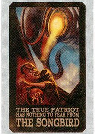
the clash between the Founders and Vox Populi, "a sort-of internationalist Marxist group that's formed in this city as a response to the excesses of the Founders," according to Levine. Where the original *BioShock* experienced its political turmoil prior to the player's arrival, in *Infinite* Booker not only experiences it as it's happening, but he also plays a key role in it.

The threat becomes immediate when we're recognized by one of the Vox Populi; what follows is one of the more intense, brain-melting shootouts we've seen in a game (and we've seen many). Booker uses his various resources: pistol, rocket launcher, his ability to suspend enemies in mid-air, and, most impressively, the game's Sky-lines. As he tears through the skies like a runaway roller coaster, taking out enemies and using the environment for cover, the emergent and varied nature of the game's combat becomes evident. "The Sky-lines are not a 'travel from here to here' tool," says Levine. "They really are a combat tool."

Hype is a dangerous thing, but we've seen enough to believe that *Infinite* will be something extraordinary. The sophomore release (*BioShock 2* was handled by a different development team) has much to live up to, certainly, but what's on display today is so superbly orchestrated, so full of life and subtext, it's difficult not to expect great things. "That was amazing," says Elizabeth at the end of the combat sequence. Booker's response? "Good, because I don't think I can do it again." **EVAN SHAMOON**

Home Again

A songbird and a prayer for Elizabeth

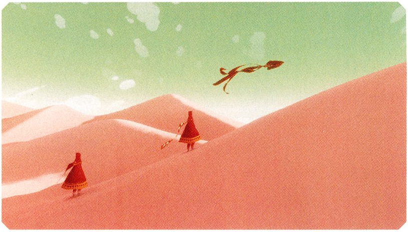

THE TRUE PATRIOT HAS NOTHING TO FEAR FROM
THE SONGBIRD

Toward the end of our demo, the menacing Songbird—a spectacular winged metallic beast—finally tracks us down. Just as he's about to turn us into ground beef, Elizabeth jumps in front of him. "Stop! Don't hurt him!" she screams. The enormous creature pauses; Elizabeth has been its only friend since she was five years old, and vice-versa. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry, I never should have left. I never should have left. Take me back. Take me home. Please." Which the sentient beast does, flying off into the distance, with Elizabeth in tow.

HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2011** Pub **SCEA** Dev **thatgamecompany**

Journey

Mystery mountain-bound



A vast ocean of shimmering sand lies before us, as far as the eye can see. As we tilt our controller, the Sixaxis pans the camera and we realize we are alone in a desert populated only by smooth hills and obelisks of unknown origin. A light breeze graciously brushes past our hooded wanderer, and his (or her?) cloak flutters in the wind. A sense of equanimity overcomes us; yes, we are alone—but we are unafraid. A beacon of light shines in the distance, sparking our curiosity, and we begin to explore the great unknown. Welcome to *Journey*.

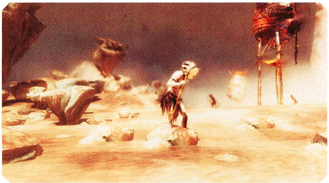
According to thatgamecompany (*flOw*, *Flower*), *Journey* is about evoking player emotion through interpretive narrative and a mutual relationship with the game world. We find bits of cloth floating in the desert, which charge our scarf and allow us to temporarily soar through the air. Yet we do not *take* these things from the environment; they exist in an interdependent capacity. We free other shreds of cloth from captivity and they let us explore new heights.

Journey also takes an unconventional approach to multiplayer. We may encounter a fellow wanderer (only ever seeing one other player at a time), but no player ID or chat options exist. We can signal wanderers using *Journey's* built in "shout," or perhaps by jumping around, but we have no control over how they might respond—we could have a great adventure together in this gorgeous, warming world, or the unknown traveler could wander off, never to be seen again. Either way, our glimpse of *Journey* has us eager to continue the trek later this year. **RYAN TALJONICK**

UPDATE Format **PSN** ETA **Summer** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Montpellier**

From Dust

Legendary game designer Eric Chahi moves the world



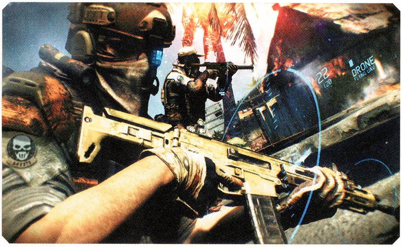
▲ Players can use water to reshape this parched landscape. Water also brings life, in the form of lush vegetation that can grow in proper soil.

Eric Chahi started developing games in 1983, and has designed some of the medium's most compelling worlds. Perhaps his greatest achievement was a 1991 title called *Out of This World*, which used rotoscoped animation and a minimal aesthetic in ways rarely seen.

Fast-forward 20 years, and Chahi is on the brink of releasing his latest creation, the PSN title *From Dust*. Unlike *World* and his lavish 2D platformer *Heart of Darkness* (1998), *Dust* is an open-ended sandbox. The world is viewed from an elevated camera, and Chahi has described it as *Populous'* spiritual successor. Instead of micro-management of resources, however, the player attempts to protect his tribe using a set of limited powers to move matter—earth, water, or lava—around the world. There are no objectives other than survival.

Despite the high stakes, *From Dust's* experience is rather meditative. The game's tropical setting helps set the tone for the gameplay: lifting chunks of matter from the earth, one must shape the land to defend against oncoming tsunamis, volcanoes, and erosion. The tribe is able to harness spiritual powers to freeze water and stop time, among other tricks.

Chahi spent years studying and photographing real-life volcanoes and upon returning to France after one of his trips, began creating the game that would eventually be picked up by Ubisoft. Chahi sums it up best: "*From Dust* is a game about the passage of time and the relationship between man and the forces of nature." The results of his labors, like our in-game endeavors, may prove transformative *and* transportive. **EVAN SHAMOON**



▲ *Future Soldier's* HUD allows the in-game character, using various augmented reality and projection methods, to see anything visible to the player.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **Q1 2012** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Paris**

Ghost Recon
Future Soldier
The art of war

Given the recent events concerning Seal Team 6 and Osama bin Laden, it's difficult to avoid drawing parallels between Ubisoft's most recent entry in the Tom Clancy franchise and, well, the real world. The game is drenched in the sort of technological sophistication and surveillance that we've been reading about in the news.

Absolutely crucial for success in *Future Soldier* is our ability to gather intelligence on the enemy, in both the single- and multiplayer. This can be achieved in many ways, but the most compelling may be the player-controlled drone. Fly it into enemy territory and it relays relevant locational data to our squad, enabling us to see opposing soldiers through walls and around corners. We'll also be able to use it to mark enemies and source the location of mines, all of which will be crucial for victory.

There is also, of course, shooting. *Future Soldier* offers 50-plus guns and nearly as many modifications and attachments. Crafting our own weapon can become a project in and of itself, with a single gun allowing for numerous variations. The third-person, cover-based action features fortifications that crumble realistically when fired upon, and success is contingent on proper suppressing fire. The campaign will also be playable either solo or in co-op. EVAN SHAMOON

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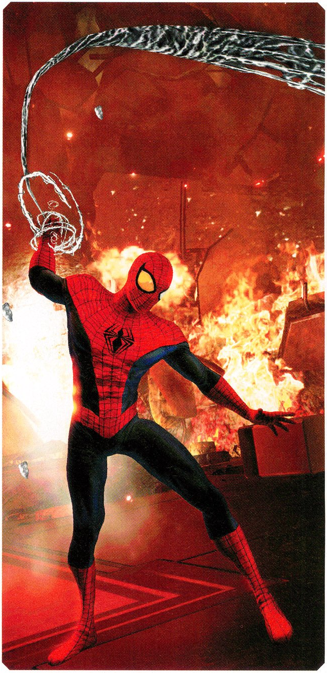


FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **Activision** Dev **Beenox**

Spider-Man
Edge of Time
Shattering time

The Amazing Spider-Man and Spider-Man 2099 return in *Spider-Man: Edge of Time*, which features an all-new villain in Anti-Venom and a new twist: The actions of one Spidey can alter the timeline of the other as they collaborate to save the world. When both Spider-men explore the same radioactive facility in their respective timelines, an unexpected explosion in Peter Parker's universe means he must contain exposed radioactive cores, but doing so also activates the fail-safes in the future dimension, saving Spider-Man 2099 from certain death. RYAN TALJONICK

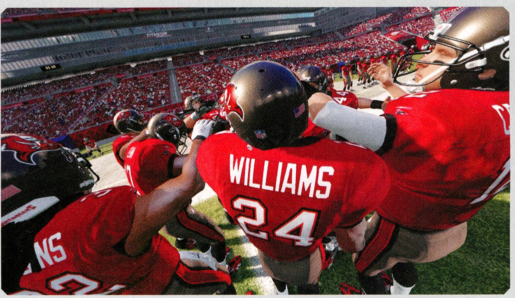
The latest on...

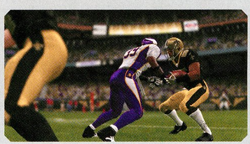
New shots, new games, new info

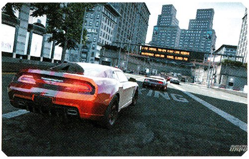
Madden NFL 12

Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub **EA Sports** Dev **EA Tiburon**

There's a six-pronged plan for the *Madden NFL's* yearly update, and gridiron fans will be glad to know the series is instituting improvements such as custom playbooks allowing us to pick and choose our own offensive and defensive play package from the game's 75 team-specific playbooks, a new collision system that considers factors such as a runner's momentum, 3D grass, online communities, broadcast-style intro sequences where teams run out on the field with their mascots and cheerleaders in tow, and a dynamic player performance system wherein our players will see boosts to their confidence and skills after a standout game.



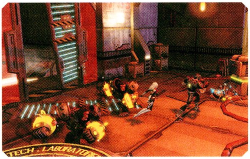




Ridge Racer: Unbounded

Format **PS3** ETA **February 2012** Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Bugbear Entertainment**

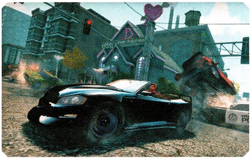
"Drive, destroy, dominate," is the mantra for this all-new direction for the *Ridge Racer* series. *Unbounded* drops us into the appropriately named Shatter City for automotive mayhem with a host of sleek street vehicles.



Wanted Corp

Format **PSN** ETA **Summer** Pub **Zoo Games** Dev **Eko System**

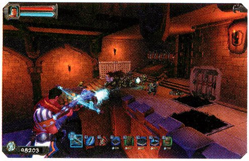
We become bounty hunters in this Move-compatible third-person shooter as we hunt down escaped fugitives with friends in either local or online co-op. We can also switch characters between a psychic and a heavy-weapons expert to vary up gameplay.



Saints Row: The Third

Format **PS3** ETA **December** Pub **THQ** Dev **Volition**

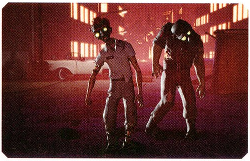
The Saints Row Initiation Station, a free pre-launch character creation download, has been announced. Players can create their own ridiculous videogame characters to be shared with the world as well as uploaded as playable characters in the upcoming game.



Orcs Must Die!

Format **PSN** ETA **Summer** Pub/Dev **Robot Entertainment**

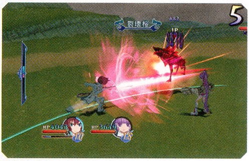
Defend more than 20 fortresses from orcs and other ugly baddies using various traps and weapons, with new defenses added as levels are completed. See enemies get massacred in a truly gory, over-the-top spectacle in this 3D, action-oriented twist on tower defense.



Dead Block

Format **PSN** ETA **Summer** Pub **Digital Reality**
Dev **Candygun Games**

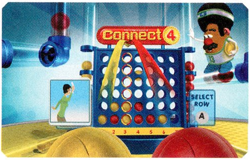
Zombies have taken over and an unlikely trio of survivors must protect themselves at all costs. As a survivor, we will build barricades, set traps, and, if necessary, fight with the weapons at our disposal to rid the town of zombies



Tales of Graces F

Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub/Dev **Namco Bandai**

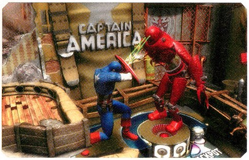
A cute (yet hardcore) action-RPG, *Tales of Graces F* has been turned into a juggernaut with the addition of a 10-hour epilogue not seen in its original Wii version. We're looking forward to new battle skills, additional costumes, and its four-player multiplayer, too.



Family Game Night 4: The Game Show

Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Wahoo Studios**

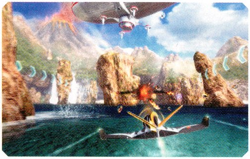
Board games are a thing of the past, replaced by Connect 4 Basketball and Yahtzee! Bowling with Move support. Now we can leap around while we show grandma who's boss, but what will we flip over in rage when we lose at Monopoly?



Marvel Pinball: Captain America

Format **PSN** ETA **June** Pub/Dev **Zen Studios**

What could be more patriotic than Captain America and pinball? Cap's shield of justice will soon grace *Marvel Pinball's* assortment of superhero tables as DLC. If our pinball scores could be translated into real-life crime-fighting skills, we'd be slingin' shields in no time.



SKYDRIFT

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2011** Pub/Dev **Digital Reality**

Choose from one of eight different planes and take to the skies in this downloadable arcade-style flight racer. Luckily our sub-par racing skills will be supplemented with enemy-destroying power-ups; we'll be packing enough firepower to make *Top Gun's* Maverick proud.

Gut Reaction

The right and the blight

▲Loyalty Appreciation

Sony thanks us by offering a year of ID theft protection and free games for download.

▲World War III

Modern Warfare 3 will be available in November and, yes, there will be guns.

▲Sounds Good

Finally! Sony offers an easy-to-connect wireless headphone for a measly $99.

▼Mass Delay

Mass Effect 3 has sadly been pushed back from the end of 2011 to an early 2012 release.

▼No Trophies?

Though we love the idea of PSP games remastered for our PS3s, we're bummed by a lack of Trophies.

▼Elitist Outcry

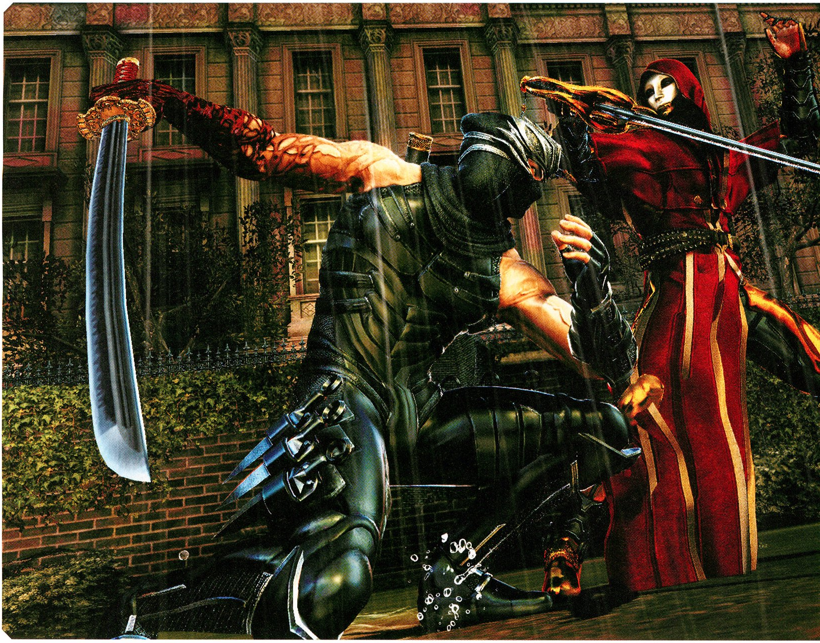
C'mon, Internetz! Activision may sometimes deserve your scorn, but *Call of Duty: Elite* is a perfectly reasonable—maybe even great—online premium offering.

SHARPENED SWORDS

Tecmo Koei has a bone to pick—*make that, shatter*—with the upcoming Ninja Gaiden 3 **By Evan Shamoon**

WORLD EXCLUSIVE SCREENS
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2012** Pub **Tecmo Koei** Dev **Team Ninja**



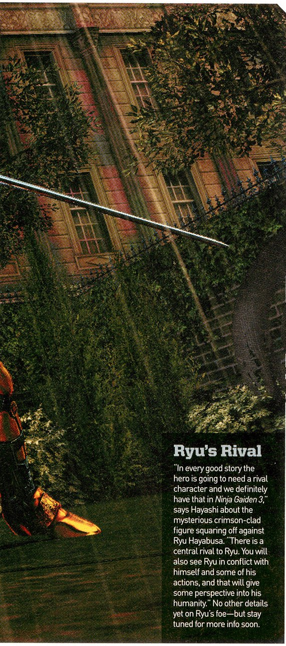
It seems almost quaint to begin a story about a Japanese videogame with an anecdote about sushi—but bear with us. After spending the day in Team Ninja's Tokyo offices playing and discussing the studio's forthcoming *Ninja Gaiden 3*, we sit down for dinner with several team members at a local *izakaya*. Shared orders are passed around, including a small plate of sushi. Localization producer Peter Garza asks if we've ever had proper "fresh" sushi. "In certain restaurants, you point to one of the fish swimming around their little aquarium. Then they take it to the back, kill it, and bring it out to you," he explains. During the meal, it's not uncommon for a piece of the flesh to give a sudden "wiggle," as if it's about jump off the plate. Garza says the experience can be "a bit strange" for first-timers—we'd imagine it's pretty strange for the fish, too.

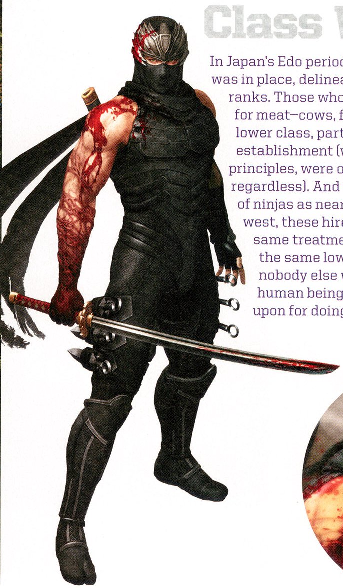
It's also, however, a pointed analogy for *Ninja Gaiden 3*. Perhaps more than anything else, Team Ninja's goal with the game has been to effectively reproduce the experience of physically cutting through another living being. "We want people to feel the cutting aspect, the cutting someone down, actually killing someone with a sword," says producer Yosuke Hayashi. Enemies are not meat on legs, but rather, living beings that must be slaughtered. "Up until now, enemies have been pretty much just like robots; they've been faceless enemies. We want people to feel now that they're actually cutting a human being, cutting them down and killing them with a sword.

Garza, the translator, clarifies: "When I say 'cut,' in Japanese there are two different characters for cutting. There's cutting a piece of meat or [cutting] some paper, and then there's *cutting*—like cutting someone and killing them and separating them. In Japanese, they're very specific about using the character for cutting someone down. It's not just cutting anything—you're cutting someone with a sword. You're cutting them down and killing them. It's an easy difference to make in Japanese, but sometimes it doesn't come across in English."

The Final Cut

It does, however, come across in *Ninja Gaiden 3*. The correct series of strikes or movements leads to a mid-combo quick-time event, in which the player is asked to drill down on a single button to unleash a bone-crunching final blow. "*Dankotsu*, in Japanese, basically means 'cutting through bone,'" explains Hayashi. "In *Ninja Gaiden 3*, when you're killing an enemy, you have this 'steel on bone' where you can kill them in one strike. The idea was to kill them in one strike—to cut them down. And you have the player figure out how to get to that one point. That sort of gameplay element has been added as an expression of these arts, trying to make you feel more





Class Warfare

In Japan's Edo period, a specific caste system was in place, delineating the society by class ranks. Those whose jobs it was to kill animals for meat—cows, fish, etc.—were considered lower class, particularly to the Buddhist establishment (who, despite their religious principles, were often said to eat this meat regardless). And though we tend to think of ninjas as near-mythic superheros in the west, these hired assassins were given the same treatment and considered part of the same lower class. They did the work nobody else wanted do—namely, kill other human beings—and were looked down upon for doing so.

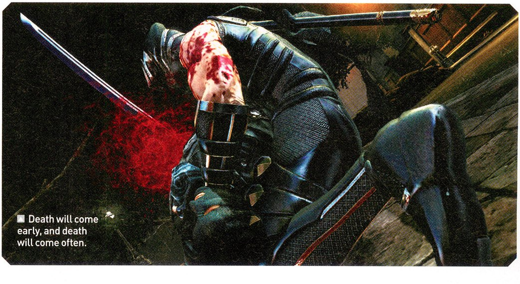
Ryu's Rival

"In every good story the hero is going to need a rival character and we definitely have that in *Ninja Gaiden 3*," says Hayashi about the mysterious crimson-clad figure squaring off against Ryu Hayabusa. "There is a central rival to Ryu. You will also see Ryu in conflict with himself and some of his actions, and that will give some perspective into his humanity." No other details yet on Ryu's foe—but stay tuned for more info soon.

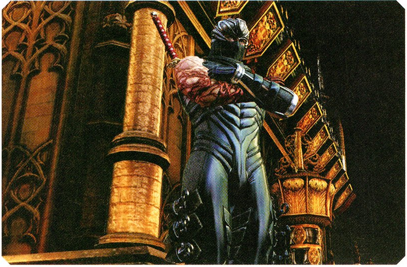
human and make the cutting into someone feel more visceral and more real." Each enemy has its own "highway" to *dankotsu*, and unpacking them will become a challenge unto itself. "So how you deal with different enemies is sort of up to the player, and you can figure out the patterns for each one. There's not just one answer," says Hayashi.

In shooters—the genre that comprises the vast majority of today's blockbuster titles—the player is tasked with killing from a distance. This is decidedly not the case in *Ninja Gaiden 3*: The combat is up-close and personal, and our victims' blood spurts onto us, staining our clothing after a few violent kills. The camera is also up-close—what the team believes is the appropriate distance for the use of a katana—allowing us to see our enemies' bodies as the sword is thrust into their stomachs. "It's meant to feel like you're taking their life," says director Fumihiko Yasuda. "You can hear their last breath."

"Up until now, enemies have been pretty much just like robots; they've been faceless enemies."

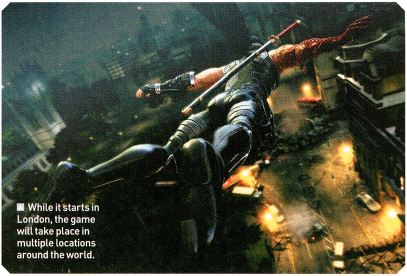


Death will come early, and death will come often.



Multi Ninja

As astute readers of this magazine will attest, we reported several months back that *Ninja Gaiden 3* will include, for the first time, a "complex multiplayer mode." This is confirmed by Hayashi, who insists that his team is looking to do something different in the space. "As we play multiplayer games over here, we feel that there have been small changes in online gameplay, but nothing hugely drastic, especially with shooters; little tweaks here and there, but no major changes," says Hayashi. "What we want to do with *Ninja Gaiden* is make an online experience that we, as a Japanese developer, can make. Something that only a Japanese developer can make, through the kind of gameplay we have and the experience that we can offer." How it stacks up against the multiplayer mode found in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, of course, remains to be seen.



▲ While it starts in London, the game will take place in multiple locations around the world.

Generally speaking, when a game developer unveils its new title for the first time, it does so with careful control of the situation. "No hands-on" is, of course, the most common stipulation: This is early code, goes the reasoning, and the developer would not want to taint a journalist's impression of its game by letting it be played in such an unpolished state.

Not so today. It's noted that we are the first outside of Tecmo to actually see the game, let alone play it. Which we do: Upon entering into Tecmo's "special conference room"—detailed with stained wooden furniture and high-end electronics—we're presented with a *Ninja Gaiden 3* title screen on the television, and a lone DualShock 3 controller resting on the table. "It's all you," says Garza, smiling as he motions us toward the set.

Our demo begins in London, where Ryu Hayabusa stands atop a skyscraper looking down at the city. Cut to flashback sequence: Japan in the springtime, blooming cherry blossom trees painting the screen with gentle hues of white and pink. As the camera tracks from left to right, the cherry blossoms give way to a military helicopter, parked amongst them. Inside a temple, Ishigami—who works for the Japanese Ministry of Defense, External Affairs—and curiously named female operative Mizuki McCloud meet with Hayabusa over tea. They show him grainy video footage of the British prime minister's residence, which has been overtaken by a terrorist organization. It's all presented in broad, over-the-top style: "Why do you need my help?" Hayabusa asks at one point. "Oh no, we don't need your help," responds McCloud. "*You need ours.*"

London Falling

Moments later we find ourselves back in London, swan-diving from the top of the aforementioned building. On our way down, a quick-time event solicits a button press in order to take out an oblivious soldier. This kicks the festivities off proper: Once on the ground, we're immediately thrust into an all-out war with legions of British soldiers in riot gear and holding automatic weapons. This is *Ninja Gaiden*, through and through, with combos, juggles, and whip-fast swordplay once again the order of the day. The Circle button flings auto-targeted shuriken, the X

The camera pulls in close to best replicate the grueling intimacy of swordplay.

Everything—from combat to clambering—is built so the player is more connected to the on-screen actions.

Our demo begins in London, where Ryu Hayabusa stands atop a skyscraper looking down at the city.

button jumps, Square and Triangle launch light and strong attacks, respectively, and R1 blocks. When we accumulate enough energy and our arm begins to glow red, we hold the Triangle button to go into a furious, violent rage (dubbed an "Ultimate Technique"). The gray streets of London are dotted with red double-decker busses, and soldiers with thick cockney accents shriek "I don't wanna die!" just as they're about to be sliced in half.

Along the way, quick-time events challenge us to slide underneath armored trucks and out of the way of falling rubble from nearby buildings. We eventually make our way to a stretch of thick fog, which proves tricky: Using our ninja senses (push the Right-analog stick to "sense proper path"), we're forced to defend ourselves in 360 degrees. At one point we must climb a stone wall using successive, precisely timed pulls of L2 and R2, interspersed with throwing stars fired up the side of the building at enemies looming overhead.

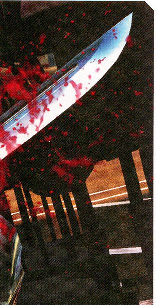
The demo is capped by a battle with an enormous, eight-legged robotic spider. Predictably, each leg must be attacked and disposed of individually, until a reactor core exposes itself. In stark contrast to, say, the upcoming reboot of *Tomb Raider*, this is old-school gameplay. "In *Ninja Gaiden*, we have a history and it's been a successful history," says Hayashi. "People have liked it and there are fans out there, so we want to keep the history that has worked for us, keep what's worked and change where we feel we need to change. But there's no reason to throw everything out just to do something new because we still have stuff that works."

Here's why one should not bring a gun to a swordfight when Ryu Hayabusa is involved.

Gameplay is once again very much about the art of swordplay, and the creative use of buttons and directional presses—"breakdancing with fingers," so to speak. Mid-air spinning juggles, "leapfrog" grabs that extend into somersaults, and bouquets of jump-kicks blend seamlessly into one another, when performed properly. The ability to move between rapid-fire and carefully spaced taps of buttons is key; wild mashers will find themselves launching combos at nobody in particular, and lazy fighters become quickly overwhelmed. Suffice to say, it will be instantly familiar to fans of the series.

The game is once again decidedly less about realistic physics than it is frenetic, fast-paced action: Enemies run around with impossibly large rocket launchers propped on their shoulders, tumble 20 feet on impact, and launch hailstorms of bullets and exploding shells in any given direction. "For us, physics is just a tool," says Hayashi. "If it helps the game, great, we'll use it, and if it doesn't help the game—if it hurts the game—it shouldn't be used." He says the decision is as much a technical one as it is a stylistic choice. "If you took *Call of Duty* and you had to run it at 30 frames per second just for a bunch of cool physics, would you rather have 30 fps or would you rather have a 60 fps *Call of Duty*? In the same way with *Ninja Gaiden*, would you rather have a bunch of cool physics, or would you rather have a 60 fps kick-ass action game? We're not saying it's one or the other, but that's the way we feel about physics. If it helps, we can look at it, but if not, we don't need it. It's all about the game."

As Hayabusa slices his way through enemies, his clothing becomes progressively bloodier. "When we started thinking about the



PlayStation
NINJA GAIDEN 3

Empty Scabbard?

Wondering where Ryu's sword is on our cover? Here's Hayashi's explanation for the striking image: "A sword is extremely important to a ninja. Hayabusa would never just lose his sword for no reason. The fact that it's gone shows you just how serious whatever happened actually is. Take a good, hard look at the cover and remember it well..."

Made in Japan

As is often the case with fighting games, sword-based combat game mechanics developed by western studios tend to rarely be as refined as those produced by Japanese studios. Hayashi believes this is something baked into the Japanese psyche: "Some of it just comes from culture, that difference," he says. "Like Japanese kids, when they're walking home from school...if it's raining and they have an umbrella, they'll sword fight with the umbrellas, and then their parents will yell at them [laughs]. But from a small age, they're already playing with swords. Maybe western kids use umbrellas as rifles or something, maybe they play with guns, I don't know. So we're just sort of steeped in that culture, that tradition of swordplay."

Despite pressure to cater to American and European audiences, Hayashi insists that his studio is making games the way it always has. "Right now it seems like a lot of Japanese developers are trying to appeal more to the west, and trying to maybe mimic western games. But for us, we're trying to be who we are and just be a Japanese developer, and make a good game coming from where we are and who we are."

ideas for this game, one of the concepts that we came up with first is the Japanese dark hero," says Hayashi of the project's onset. "Ryu Hayabusa has been sort of there for the player to control, and he is obviously there for the action. But for this one, we decided to try to make him more human and show him more as a human character than just an avatar for the player's actions." The team comes from a long line of fighting games—the *Dead or Alive* series, currently at number four, not including offshoots—and is thereby well-versed in the art of close combat. Its understanding of tension and calibration, move animations in which a single extra frame can unbalance an attack or break a combo's fluidity, has already been honed in the series' previous titles.

In For the Kill

Hayashi chose as the game's director Fumihiko Yasuda; while fluent in the language of combat, it's his interest in the notion of immersion that Hayashi believes will help rejuvenate the series. "We figured that we already know how to present the feeling of cutting through someone," says Hayashi. "You know, we're sort of experts at getting that feel down." An avid reader of James Joyce, Yasuda left a career in film to pursue another in game development. "For *NG3*, we want the player to really control Ryu in all the different situations they will face in the game, such as climbing walls with daggers and jumping from crumbling ground as it collapses around them," says the director. "We're not talking about simple QTEs that are everywhere now. We think that conveying the feeling of 'player equals main character' through intuitive controls for whatever current situation the stage and character is in will help immerse the player." He cites moments such as when Ryu is holding on to something, where the player will press and hold a button to correspond to the continued hold.

"We have looked at *Heavy Rain*, for how controls connect to immersion, and *Uncharted* and *BioShock*, for how they script events," continues Yasuda, who also considers the original *Modern Warfare* something of a watershed moment. In terms of tone, he cites movies like *Hellboy* and *Wolverine*, mixed with TV dramas like *CSI* and *Fringe*. But the developer looked abroad only for narrative inspirations; combat is decidedly local. "Battles are our own, incorporating a new 'Steel on Bone' element into the proven *Ninja Gaiden* fights. We haven't really looked at other games' battle systems."

Ninja Tech

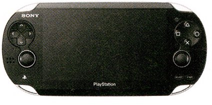
Various new technologies have entered the PlayStation ecosystem since the last installment of *Ninja Gaiden*. Some, according to Hayashi, are more appealing than others. Here's the rundown:

On Move

"We're looking at Move; we're certainly thinking about it, and trying some things out. But again, it goes back to the gameplay: If it's going to make the game better, we'll certainly try to put it in. But right now it's just an experimental phase. We're just seeing how we would merge it with the game and how it would work with the game."

On stereoscopic 3D

"Looking at penetration for 3D TVs, and our fans and what they're looking at, we feel the fans would enjoy more a full 60 frames per second 2D experience, than sacrificing anything for 3D. So for right now that's what we're focusing on; 3D is not that important to us right now. We've looked at other titles...and all of the titles, when they switch to 3D, the framerate goes down. That's not something we're willing to give up just for 3D."



On next-gen portables

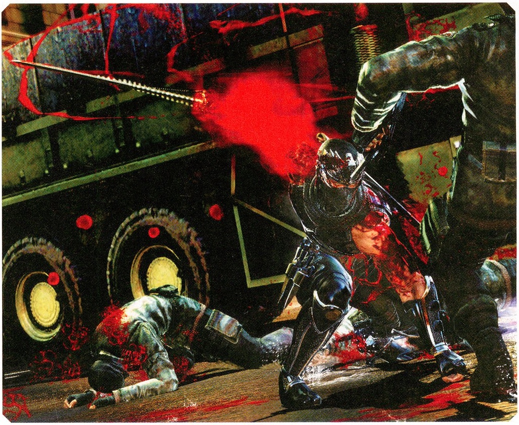
"We do think there are different ways to design games for consoles and handhelds. Different gameplay works for consoles versus handhelds. But just the fact that there is another console—more tech, new technology and a new way to do things—that's very exciting for us as developers. We are currently looking at NGP, and we have our ideas for how we might be able to do things with it. It's exciting to be able to be creative and think about it."

Like a good host, Ryu is ready to show any size party—be it a single guest or a whole army—a bloody good time.

Recently, many publishers have attempted to rejuvenate waning franchises with wholesale reboots. Having played just a fraction, it's already apparent that *Ninja Gaiden 3* is *not* one of them: The game is holding on tightly to the core of what has fostered a loyal fanbase, in terms of its finely honed mechanics and hyper-violent, over-the-top situations. While it is clearly focused more on narrative, the tone is still wildly eccentric: We're a ninja fighting literal armies without even a pistol, jumping off buildings without even a cape.

The team has hired a "name" writer (yet to be revealed), and is generally putting more emphasis on and energy into the narrative wrapping of its title. "*Ninja Gaiden* as a series really hasn't focused on the story very much, but for this one we have actually used a famous writer for the story, and we are definitely putting more of an emphasis of bringing the story aspect into the game," says Hayashi. "*Ninja Gaiden* is an action game, and we're not trying to get away from that at all. The challenge for us now is: How do you put in that heart and that feeling into an action game?"

Make no mistake: This is still hardcore, gutsy, intensely violent ninja action.



As it looks to compete with games of wider reach and somewhat broader appeal, Team Ninja knows it must evolve. The developer points out several times that it's attempting to maintain its "hardcore" aspects while opening it up to more casual gamers, but refuses to reveal specifics at this time. Its nods toward "interactive realism" appear more mechanical than stylistic, a point Yasuda reinforces. "Of course things like seamless performance and a game design rich with variations and changes are important, but I feel the most important aspect is having the player control the action as much as possible," says Yasuda of his goals for the title. "Having the player in sync with the character keeps the player emotionally involved, and provides a strong motivation for a deeper level of absorption in the game. And involving and connecting the player like that is something that only games can offer."

It's a complex goal—more complicated than a mere investment of resources—but it's something the whole team is focused on and driving toward. "Our mission is to make them more human so that when the player, as Hayabusa, is cutting them down, they'll feel like they're cutting down a real person and not just some computer-generated cannon fodder," says Hayashi. "Just having terrorists be enemies and you have to cut them down because they're bad guys—that's too simple. We wanted to make them not just the 'bad terrorists.' It is a big challenge for us to figure out how to put that feeling into normal gameplay, and it's not something that we can really explain. It's just something that you're going to have to feel and experience for it to really come across."

> "Having the player in sync with the character keeps the player emotionally involved, and provides a strong motivation for a deeper level of absorption in the game."

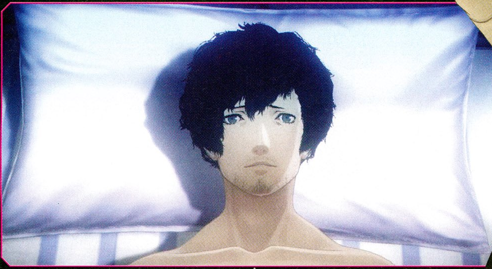
LOVE & DEATH

Adult themes, puzzling puzzles, and romantic horror—Catherine is one peculiar package

By Ryan Taljonick

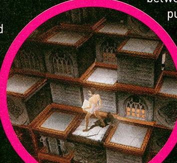
Catherine

Format **PS3** ETA **July** Pub **Atlus** Dev **Atlus**



It's been said love is a battlefield—but in Atlus' *Catherine,* love is more accurately described as a sheepish escape from fork-wielding demons, giant-tongued temptresses, and chainsaw-spewing mutant babies. Yeah, love can be like that.

It begins as the title screen loads: A cry for help sounds, and protagonist Vincent Brooks is shown bound by barbed wire to floating blocks, his wounds bleeding as his girlfriend, Katherine, sits above him, oblivious to his plight. For some reason, Vincent has ram horns growing from the back of his head. Suspended gender symbols sway in the background as sheep plummet from the sky, bleating in despair as they fall to their deaths.



"The main character, Vincent, is a 32-year-old salaryman who doesn't have much going for him," says project director Katsura Hashino. "He wants nothing more than to turn away from adult pressures like careers and marriage to live a carefree life, but his girlfriend [Katherine] wants to marry him, and not only that, she's pregnant. But then one night, he gets seduced by a young beauty he meets at a bar."

Vincent has some serious decisions to make about his life, and his fate lies in our hands.

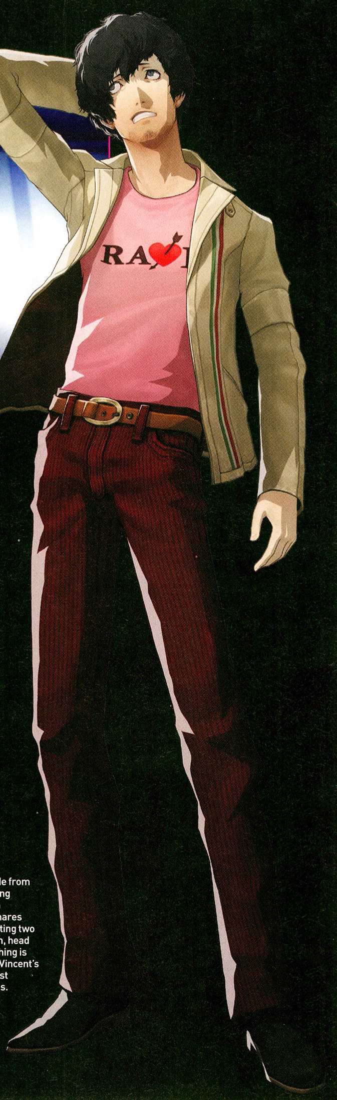
We are transported to an eerie dream realm in which a seemingly endless staircase of blocks awaits us. Not amused by his current situation, Vincent, wearing only a pair of boxers and the aforementioned ram horns while clutching a pillow, shouts for help. "Hurry up and climb!" responds an unknown voice. "If you fall, you're dead." One thing quickly becomes evident: Vincent's life is...complicated.

Bed Blocked

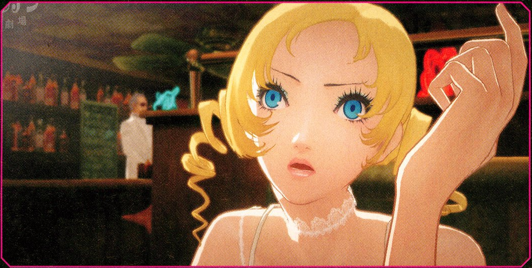
From the team behind *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3* and *Persona 4*, *Catherine* is Atlus' first internally developed PS3 title, which saw a February release in Japan earlier this year. The game showcases adult themes and a mature narrative that explores the complex relationships between men and women. Part puzzler, part dating-sim, and part *what the hell is going on?*, *Catherine* is a bizarre title unlike anything we've seen before—and we're okay with that.

The meat of *Catherine's* gameplay occurs in Vincent's nightmares. Each nightmare is a block-based puzzle in which cubes can be manipulated to create a climbable stairway to salvation, and there are multiple approaches to every puzzle. As the floor beneath us begins to give way in this initial nightmare, we start pushing, pulling, and scaling numerous blocks to reach our goal: consciousness.

"The puzzle part is about struggle, of constantly having to come up with new



▶ Aside from escaping hellish nightmares and dating two women, head scratching is one of Vincent's greatest hobbies.



▲Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned—especially one wearing a fancy lace neckband. Will Catherine be Vincent's ruin or salvation?

Part puzzler, part dating-sim, and part *what the hell is going on?*, *Catherine* is a bizarre title unlike anything we've seen before.

ideas to find a way to the top," says Hashino. "Then, we started working on a story that would only work in that context, and we came up with key ideas, such as the concept of the 'stairs in life one must climb that are beyond our control,' and the 'hellish drama between a man and a woman,' and 'a man who wants to run away from pressure,' and that's where we started building Vincent's story."

Despite our best efforts, failure to quickly ascend the foreboding wall of blocks results in Vincent's gruesome death—but we're just getting started. We encounter different types of blocks as we press on, each with defining attributes. Dark blocks are movable, but take longer to manipulate, siphoning precious seconds from the always-ticking clock. We watch Vincent explode into bloody chunks as we step on a trap block, which emits a barrage of alarmingly sharp spikes. Whoops.

We start again and encounter a new problem: manipulating the wrong blocks can lead to a dead end, cutting us off from the rest of the puzzle. Thankfully, pressing the Select button lets us rewind our last block move. According to the mini-map occupying the side of our screen, we've reached the midpoint of our puzzle. We nab a checkpoint marker, lest we fall to our death yet again, and continue our climb. What we encounter next is unexpected: An anthropomorphic sheep moving blocks, climbing our wall, and impeding our progress. As we sidle up next to the sheep, Vincent pushes it from the ledge before us. Our path is clear.

We hear what sounds like a church bell in the distance, signifying the end of our journey. We encounter a particularly tricky block sequence and bypass it using a power-up found earlier in the level, which allows us to create a block out of thin air and finally reach our goal. Vincent awakens, panicked and sweaty. The nightmare is over. For now.

Catherine's Creators

Katsura Hashino
Project Director

Games *Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne, Digital Devil Saga, Persona 3, Persona 4, Trauma Center*

"We wanted [*Catherine*] to be something completely new that wasn't a spinoff or a continuation of something we'd done before—something surprising, where even we wouldn't be able to tell what kind of game we'd end up with."

Shigenori Soejima
Art Director

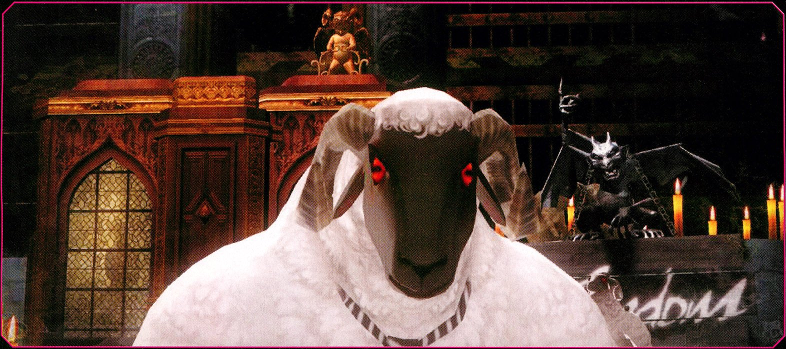
Games *Persona 2: Innocent Sin, Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3, Persona 4, Trauma Center*

"The main design of Catherine hasn't changed much since the first draft. We drew her up as a young, charming woman who wouldn't be very conservative. On the other hand, Katherine changed quite a bit during the process. We had originally incorporated a motherly warmth into her design, a trait that men often find desirable in older women, but when we finished that draft, she was just a scary woman backing Vincent into a corner."

Shoji Meguro
Music Composer

Games *Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner, Persona 3, Persona 4, Strange Journey, Trauma Center*

"During the bar scenes (or the event scenes), I composed background music much like a film score, and during the nightmare stages (the action stages), I composed background music as though for an action game. I tried not to be influenced by anything. I concentrated on matching the game content. The nightmare stages use some classical music though, so I made sure I maintained the integrity of the original piece."

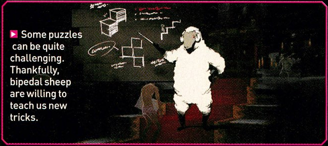


Sheep appear in varying forms throughout the game. In addition to the tie-wearing animals inhabiting Vincent's nightmares, the Stray Sheep—a bar frequented by Vincent and his friends—is an integral part of *Catherine's* gameplay. "We combined the 'lost sheep' imagery found in the Bible with the concept of the sheep we count when we want to fall asleep," explains art director Shigenori Soejima. "There are other Christian motifs in this game too, such as the church-like puzzle stages, the confessional, angels and demons."

The Stray Sheep serves as a hub for interacting with the game's many characters through dialogue and text messaging, and it is here we begin to fully appreciate *Catherine's* gorgeous artwork, created in collaboration with Japanese anime company Studio 4°C. In the background, a news reporter on the nearby television talks about an unknown epidemic sweeping the city, claiming the lives of young men while they sleep. Vincent shrugs off the news; he cannot recall his nightmare, but knows it was intense.

We interact with other characters at the bar and are pleasantly surprised at the sincerity of their conversations. Character development feels rich, and we are quickly drawn into *Catherine's* promising narrative.

"We combined the 'lost sheep' imagery found in the Bible with the concept of the sheep we count when we want to fall asleep."

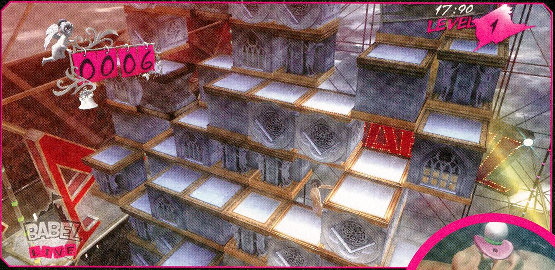


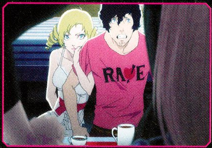
▸ Some puzzles can be quite challenging. Thankfully, bipedal sheep are willing to teach us new tricks.

As we down another rum and cola, we get a text message from Katherine. "Are you out drinking at Stray Sheep again? You know you have work tomorrow!" she chides. We cycle through a list of available responses before texting her to mind her own business. A yet-unexplained meter floats at the side of our screen and the arrow shifts away from the blue side and into the red. But *Catherine* is not about black-and-white choices—there is no wrong or right. Instead, our decisions subtly impact Vincent's life, allowing us to react to his predicaments in a very personal way. These decisions ultimately lead to the slew of multiple endings that contribute to the game's replayability.

Lamb to the Slaughter

"In many instances in this story, you will also be asked to make a choice," Hashino says. "What is marriage? What is fun about life? What kind of text messages would you send to your partner? Will you support the other





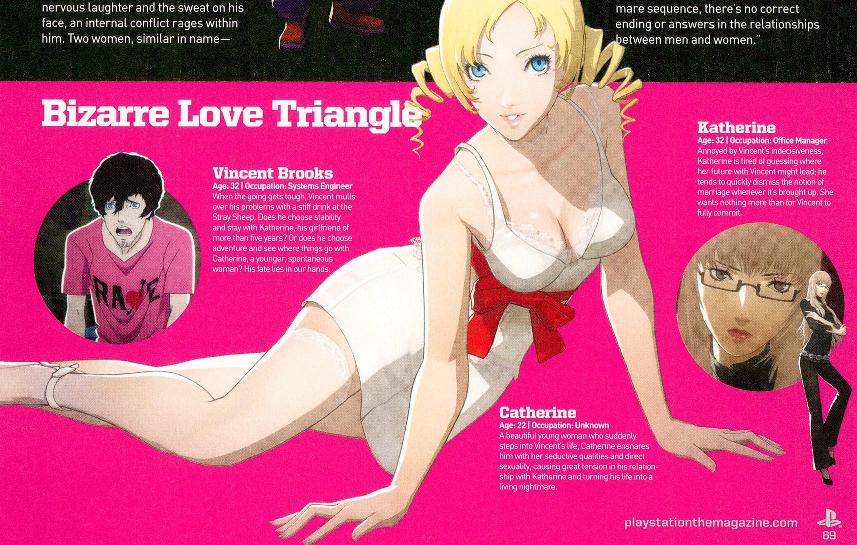
▲ If we ever dreamt of babies as ugly as this one, we'd run from it too.

sheep who are just as terrified as you, or push them away? Introduce yourself to new people at the bar, talk with friends, or go home alone? Everything changes Vincent's story and the ending depends on the player."

We down our third drink as we're approached by a blue-eyed bombshell wearing clothes that we mistake for a naughty nurse Halloween costume; the titular Catherine makes her appearance at last. She takes a seat at our table. She's flirtatious, carefree, and smokin' hot—judging by Vincent's nervous laughter and the sweat on his face, an internal conflict rages within him. Two women, similar in name—but complete lifestyle opposites—are now very much a part of his life: Katherine, the embodiment of stability, and Catherine, a manifestation of worry-free spontaneity. The camera pans away, and we are left wondering what will become of our hero's fidelity.

At his core, Vincent is a very human character; he's both relatable and imperfect. "A popular topic in Japan a few years back was that many men didn't want to get married, even though they had a girlfriend," says Hashino. "It's not that they wanted to cling to their freedom, they just didn't want to decide on the rest of their lives. People who feel the pressures of adulthood will be able to relate to Vincent. Just as there's no one correct way to climb the stairs in the nightmare sequence, there's no correct ending or answers in the relationships between men and women."

Bizarre Love Triangle



Vincent Brooks
Age: 32 | Occupation: Systems Engineer
When the going gets tough, Vincent mulls over his problems with a stiff drink at the Stray Sheep. Does he choose stability and stay with Katherine, his girlfriend of more than five years? Or does he choose adventure and see where things go with Catherine, a younger, spontaneous woman? His fate lies in our hands.

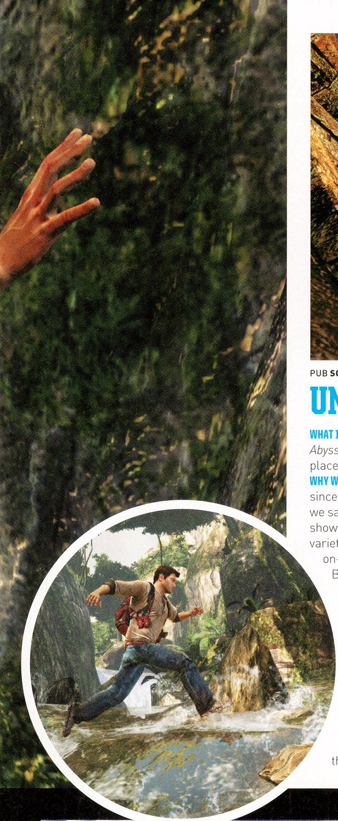
Katherine
Age: 32 | Occupation: Office Manager
Annoyed by Vincent's indecisiveness, Katherine is tired of guessing where her future with Vincent might lead; he tends to quickly dismiss the notion of marriage whenever it's brought up. She wants nothing more than for Vincent to fully commit.

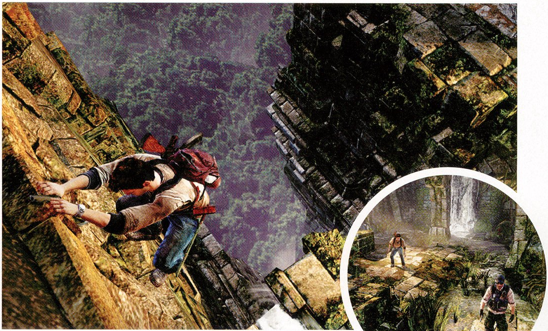
Catherine
Age: 22 | Occupation: Unknown
A beautiful young woman who suddenly steps into Vincent's life, Catherine ensnares him with her seductive qualities and direct sexuality, causing great tension in his relationship with Katherine and turning his life into a living nightmare.

TOUCH and GO

SONY
SELECT
START
PlayStation

The PlayStation Vita launch is still months away, but that didn't stop us from going hands-on with nine of the portable powerhouse's launch titles. Our overall feeling, in one word: impressive. With big-budget blockbusters, clever PSP ports, Vita-exclusive new franchises, and cross-platform play all on display, there's something in this heaping handful of handheld gaming that'll win over just about anyone. By Gary Steinman





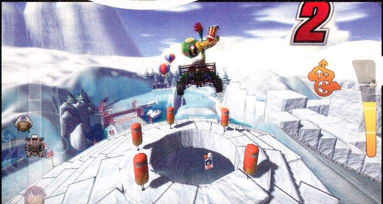
PUB **SCEA** DEV **SONY BEND**

UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS

WHAT IS IT? Not a port, nor a prequel, *Golden Abyss* is a standalone adventure that takes place before *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*.

WHY WE CARE We've had our eyes on this one since the PS Vita's big reveal in Japan, when we saw that very first tech demo, which showcased the gorgeous graphics and the variety of ways to interact with Nathan Drake on-screen. Since then, the team at Sony Bend—already one of the top devs on PSP, with their *Resistance: Retribution* and *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror* among the best shooters on that handheld—has been hard at work actually building the game. The results continue to amaze. After playing just two levels, we can already sense a blockbuster experience unfolding, with strong writing, great voice acting (Nolan North reprises his role as Drake), and sizzling cinematics. This is no doubt helped by the close collaboration with Naughty Dog creative director Amy Hennig, but credit Bend for ensuring the game works, and works well, as both a traditionally controlled game and a touchscreen gem. Some of our favorite moments include: sneaking up behind a goon, then tapping the front screen to push him over the edge; and using the Sixaxis support to pick off faraway foes when in sniper mode. But the most enjoyable way to play *Golden Abyss*, by far, is as a traditional *Uncharted* game, using the standard controls to clamber up cliff faces, duck behind cover, and blast away at baddies. This is shaping up to be every bit as solid as the PS3 versions. That says a lot.

SMOOTH MOVES *Golden Abyss* is using Naughty Dog's entire animation library created for the first two *Uncharted* games—3,000 in all. That means Drake can shoot anyone from just about anywhere: while hanging from a ledge, crouching behind cover, and so on. The game also pushes 260,000 polygons per frame, as compared to *Resistance: Retribution's* 50,000.



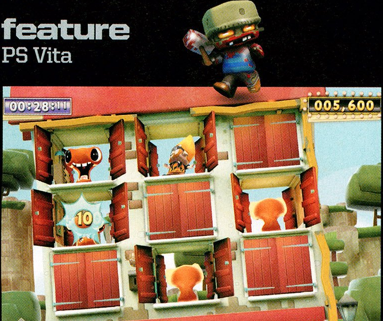
PUB **SCEA** DEV **SAN DIEGO STUDIO**

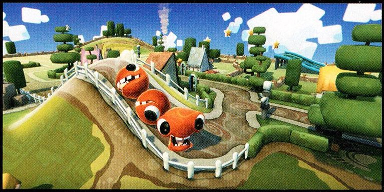
MODNATION RACERS

WHAT IS IT? Again, not a port but a new game built from the ground up to take advantage of the PS Vita's features.

WHY WE CARE *ModNation* nailed the kart-racing gameplay and the easy-to-use level-design tools in its PS3 incarnation. This one makes it even easier to build a level, using the front and back touchscreens to draw out tracks, manipulate the terrain, populate the world, even create banks in the road with simple finger swipes.

COPIOUS COURSES All two million tracks already created by the *ModNation* community will be playable on Vita.





PUB **SCEA** DEV **BIGBIG STUDIOS**

LITTLE DEVIANTS

WHAT IS IT? We're still not sure what the titular deviants are, why they're here, and why we're thwarting (helping?) them. We do know the game has 30 deviant-dashing levels (each with their own sublevels), all showcasing different ways (or combos of ways) to interact with Vita.

WHY WE CARE Don't worry: This isn't just one of those tech demos masquerading as a game that we sometimes see when a system launches. (Anyone remember PS2's *Fantavision*?) We played four of the games, and found each of them to be charmingly captivating. In Depth Charge, we used Vita's Sixaxis motion control to guide an avatar through mazes, collecting stars while dodging the standard assortment of obstacles; in terms of level design, we've seen it before, but in terms of control, it sparkles. Botz Blast is a shooter using Vita's augmented reality function: as we blast away at baddies, the back camera is on, inserting the real world into our game as a backdrop. It's simple fun, enhanced by the occasional moment of goofy surprise when we move the Vita unit (to explore a different area) and find ourselves blasting away against the backdrop of a nearby pal. Hole Roll Control uses the back touchpad to deform the on-screen terrain: our fingers create hills that guide a rolling deviant through a level, collecting stars and eventually exiting through a designated hole. And House of Whacks is sort of like whack-a-mole using both the front and back touchscreens; when a critter is facing away, we had to tap on the back, and when facing forward, we tap on the front. We were pleasantly surprised at how accurately and consistently we found the right spot on the 1:1 ratio backpad—a good sign for how intuitive it is to use that function.

SHADES OF ALF? While little is known about the deviants, we're told they have a fondness for felines. According to the devs, that means we'll be collecting cats in other unrevealed levels.

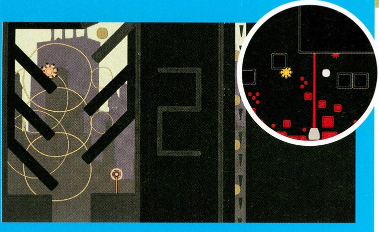
PUB **SCEA** DEV **QUEASY GAMES**

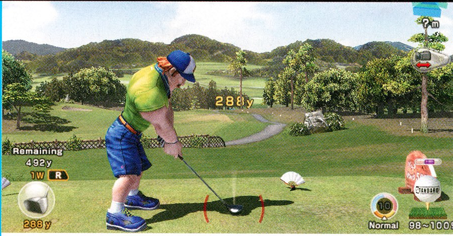
SOUND SHAPES

WHAT IS IT? A music platformer from the team behind *Everyday Shooter*.

WHY WE CARE This might be the sleeper of the launch lineup. The platforming is interesting enough, with its minimal graphics and masterful use of sounds and beats to compose an audio-visual playground. But the level designer is even better: It's both music-maker and gameplay creator in one—and it's incredibly easy to use.

REMIX Not only can we upload our levels for the community to play, but we can also download and remix other's levels.





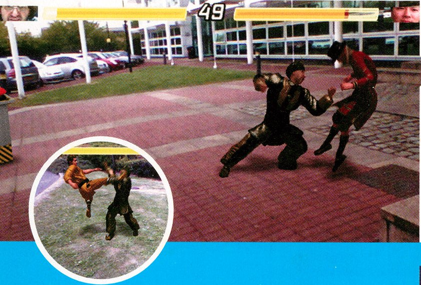
PUB **SCEA** DEV **CLAP HANZ**

HOT SHOTS GOLF

WHAT IS IT? Only our favorite PlayStation golfing franchise.

WHY WE CARE *Hot Shots* has a long history with the PlayStation (this will be the fifth platform it graces), and it's always delivered the right mix of casual fun and serious golfing gameplay. This version also uses Vita to full effect, letting us adjust our shots and position via the touchscreen, and move the camera around to explore the greens via the Sixaxis.

TOUCHED Tapping a character gets him to react, building his confidence.



PUB **SCEA** DEV **NOVARAMA**

REALITY FIGHTERS

WHAT IS IT? An augmented reality fighting game.

WHY WE CARE Not only can we take a photo of ourselves, our friends, our family, then put them directly into the game, but we can also fight on familiar terrain: The world is the backdrop for this brawler, with our custom-created fighters duking it out on our coffee tables and couches.

PHOTO FINISH The built-in camera tech here is good enough that we can snap a picture of a photograph, and it'll convert the face into a 3D likeness.

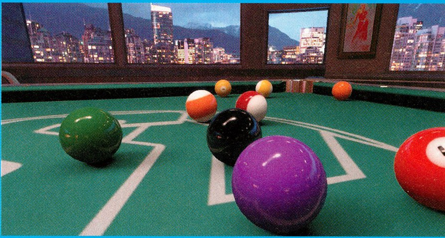
PUB **SCEA** DEV **VOOFOO STUDIOS**

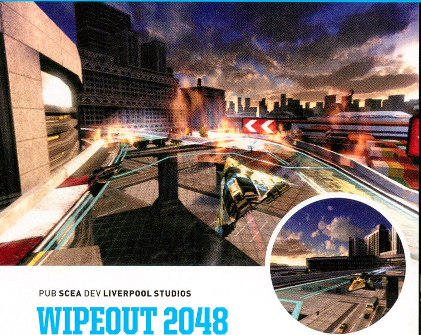
HUSTLE KINGS

WHAT IS IT? An enhanced port of a PSN pool game.

WHY WE CARE Pool is perfect on a portable system, and *Hustle Kings* is built to appeal to both casual and hardcore players alike, with a range of modes and control methods, along with minigames for a quick fix. Best yet: cross-platform play with the PS3 game.

POOL PALS Not online at the same time? *Hustle Kings* lets players compete old school, trading turns at each other's convenience.





PUB **SCEA** DEV **LIVERPOOL STUDIOS**

WIPEOUT 2048

WHAT IS IT? The latest from the stylish, futuristic racing franchise that helped define the early days of PSone.

WHY WE CARE This is two games in one. The *2048* portion is a brand-new experience built for Vita, set lower to the ground in a more urban environment. But it also comes with the tracks from *Wipeout HD*—and these can be played against PS3 gamers who own the PSN version of *HD*.

EYE CANDY To our pleasant surprise, the *2048* levels looked better on Vita than the *HD* levels on PS3.

PUB **SCEA** DEV **HOUSEMARQUE**

SUPER STARDUST DELTA

WHAT IS IT? One of the very best PSN shooters gets the full Vita treatment.

WHY WE CARE It's gorgeous, it's colorful, it's fun. This twin-stick shooter is perfect for on-the-go gaming, and it's also been upgraded to take advantage of the gyroscope (move the Vita to peek around the bend) and the touchscreen (tap the screen for secondary weapons, like black holes and crush attacks).

SHAKE IT! Stuck in a bind? Shake the Vita and it'll trigger the powerful Shockwave attack. Just watch those elbows on the bus.

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PlayStation The Official Magazine Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

Oh these sad summer months. Kids across the nation have a full three-month break from the drudgery of school (except the unlucky few who are forced to endure the dreaded torture of *summer* school), and yet the videogame release calendar remains emptier now than at any other point in the year.

Maybe game companies are trying to encourage our overstimulated youth to enjoy the balmy weather and explore the great outdoors, but the rest of us are left to wonder: Where are all the games?!"

Well, never fear, readers; the pickings may be slimmer in July than they were in January, but there are a handful of stellar titles that should tide us over until the holiday rush. The long-awaited *inFamous 2* provides the summer's definitive action game experience; the delightfully offensive *Shadows of the Damned* displays the combined creative talent of some of gaming's wildest minds; and the charmingly classic *Dungeon Siege III* reclaims dungeon crawling for the current console generation.

Add some movie games, fighting titles, and an online shooter and *BAM!* Summer is saved.

80

INFAMOUS 2

Cole MacGrath heads to the sorta Big Easy, where enemies are plenty big but far from easy. Oh well, hopefully one of them will eat Zeke.

84

BLAZBLUE: CONTINUUM SHIFT II

PSP feeling neglected? Check out this sequel to one of the most fiercely original fighting games out there!

85

HUNTED: THE DEMON'S FORGE

We never did find out which demon the forge actually belonged to, but we did hack-and-slash our way through giant spiders and dank dungeons.

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome
Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent
Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great
Wonderful yet still possesses minor flaws.

7 Good
Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable
A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre
A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed
Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

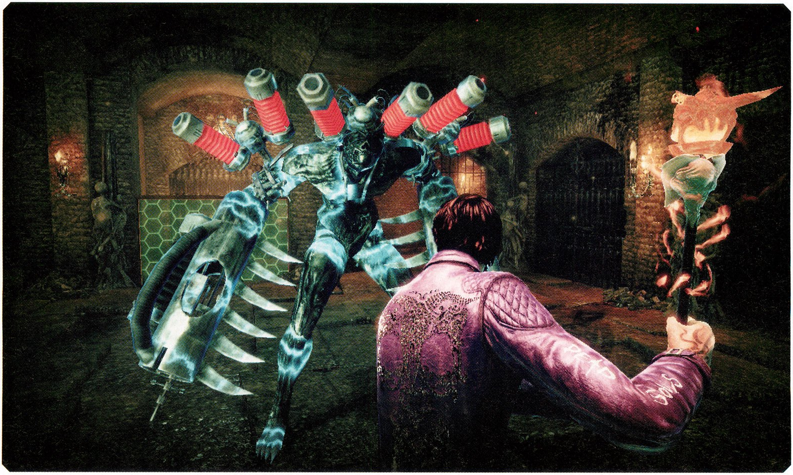
3 Poor
A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful
A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage
Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.



Shadows of the Damned

Hell ain't a bad place to be

Scarred and tattooed demon hunter Garcia Hotspur only kills because he loves. To kill.

Hotspur goes to hell in the third-person adventure *Shadows of the Damned*. In the Judeo-Christian mythology, hell is where bad people such as talentless white rapper Vanilla Ice and cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer go, so Hotspur fits right in. There, he discovers the great truth learned by sages Bill S. Preston, esq., and "Ted" Theodore Logan in the epic film *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey*: rock album covers have greatly exaggerated the coolness factor of hell.

Escape from hell demands shooting, and lots of it. Hotspur kills demons with the aid of Johnson, a demon that can transform itself into a torch and assorted guns and one of the game's many phallic references. The game adds a love interest—the stricken and kidnapped Paula—and thus sets the stage for a gross and bawdy romp.

This is clearly someone's labor of love. Japanese game development powerhouses Suda51, Shinji Mikami, and Akira Yamaoka all pool their considerable talents here, crafting a game that's as charming and clever as it is profane, relatively free of potholes, and aurally pleasant. The triumvirate's vision and skill shine through. In the hearts of these developers, *Damned* finds its salvation.

Info

Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Grasshopper Manufacture
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like hell on Earth, only more pleasant.

Boners and Johnson And One-Eyed Willy

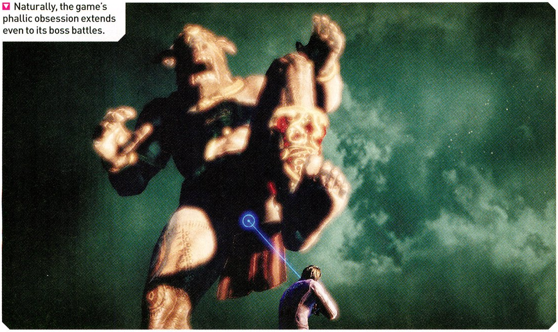
Big Boner This powerful gun can take down giant enemies with one shot.

Hotboner An upgrade to the regular Boner, this gun fires sticky explosive shots.

Johnson Our ally and greatest asset. He transforms into weapons.

One-Eyed Willy He's harmless, and his feces lights the way.

Sushi Lamp Garcia Hotspur refers to this innocuous creature as "sushi with a dick."



Naturally, the game's phallic obsession extends even to its boss battles.

No Limits

Damned sets a gruesome and convincing table. Hell has its requisite corpse piles, heads impaled on spikes, blood-streaked pathways, and pulpy overgrowths. It's further fleshed out with giant hands spewing health-sapping darkness; gates locked by baby demons demanding brains, strawberries, or eyeballs; braying goat-head lanterns; and a one-eyed "Willy" whose contribution is to mark trails with its flaming feces. Hell has vending machines dispensing the realm's beverage of choice (booze) and even a trade economy fueled by a demon hybrid, Christopher. The latter, in disgusting fashion, greedily sucks at Hotspur's hand while consuming gems and then vomits out purchased items.

The entire realm crackles with creepiness. It's an unsettling place, to be sure, and sets a fine tone. Hotspur and his demon ally Johnson are out of place here, and the game never lets us forget it. We're compelled to move on, step lively, and get the hell out of Dodge.

A pervasive light versus darkness theme serves to forward our sense of urgency. Darkness cloaks demons, and a foe thus enshrouded must first be hit with a paralyzing light shot before it can be destroyed. Hotspur cannot survive in darkness; its alien nature depletes his health and an extended stay in the shadows is fatal. There's something remarkably primal about these scenes: Hotspur grimaces and recoils in terror as he plunges into darkness, and we're drawn to the bottom right-hand corner of the game screen and the health bar. An alien hum heightens our unease in the darkness, and we can't help but be creeped out.

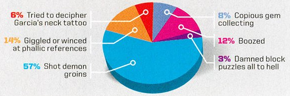
The game plunges Hotspur into darkness frequently, requiring us to frantically hunt for light sources or to rush to flee its confines. There's both dread and urgency to be had in bucketsful, and this gives the game weight. It's enough to be a stranger in a strange land, but *Damned* stretches the notion, taking it to a disconcerting extreme.

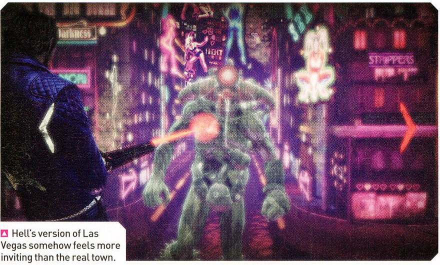
Damned Quick

The game takes its combat cues from fine specimen such as *Resident Evil 5*. Time and again, the developers opt for simple, functional mechanics, and thus we're able to concentrate on hell's many diversions relatively free of encumbrance.

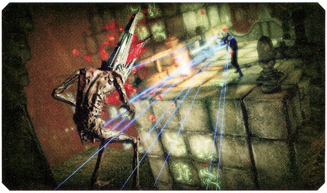
When Hotspur draws his gun, the game shifts to a close-in, over-the-shoulder view, with our protagonist's body shifting into the left-hand corner

What we did in... Shadows of the Damned

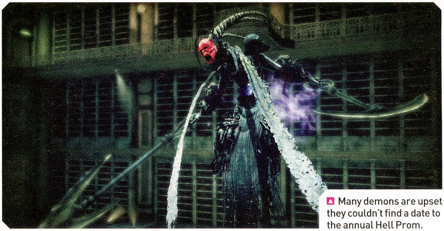




Hell's version of Las Vegas somehow feels more inviting than the real town.



"If you're going through hell, keep going." –Winston Churchill



Many demons are upset they couldn't find a date to the annual Hell Prom.

Cast List

THE DEMON HUNTER

Garcia Hotspur
Tattooed and profane, Garcia wants his true love back.

THE DEMON

Johnson
This demon is a demon hunter's best friend.

DEMONIC

Fleming
This six-eyed no-goodnik rules the underworld.

LADY LOVE

Paula
Is she worth a jaunt through hell? Hotspur thinks she is.

of the screen. It allows us to better survey battlefields and though it might seem to hamper a peripheral view, the developers have deftly included an on-screen prompt alerting us when an enemy has entered into Hotspur's blind spot, thus making him susceptible to being walloped with a melee attack. It's a compromise, sure, and a bit of a cheat, but it's a necessary evil, especially in some of hell's more cramped quarters.

Neat flourishes add to combat. We can lop off limbs a la *Dead Space*. Headshots are often serenaded with stylish views of a slow-motion bullet streaking off and exploding a demon's skull. Melee attacks allow for baseball-style home run swings and maniacal stomps and leaps on crawling enemies.

Combat never proves unwieldy, although the game does indulge in its share of gimmick-laden scrapes wherein Hotspur must target a foe's (clearly marked) weak spots. We get to battle a darkness-farting horse, a killer demon with a harmonica lodged in its throat, and a behemoth that undoes its trousers to urinate—what else?—a thick stream of shadows. *This Is Spinal Tap* noted the fine line between clever and stupid, and we're unable to discern on which side *Damned's* boss battles fall. If nothing else, they are memorable.

Keep Going

Many games are gross and/or profane. It's no challenge, say, to create the videogame version of *Porky's* or *SAW – Part XXVII*. *Damned* offers profanity and gore, but does so while still keeping a firm grasp on that wonderful intangible: charm. It has every opportunity to be mean-spirited and linger over its blood and guts, but never does so. Its hell is awful, sure, but no more so than it absolutely has to be. And in Hotspur and Johnson we get a likeable pair and the sense that these two could exist as a duo in the real world, should that ever be possible. Their banter is never forced, never Diablo Cody-esque: too clever for its own good.

We want to get Hotspur to his true love. We can relate to him. He bleats out, angrily, "I [expletive deleted] hate puzzles." When he's presented with light-exploding containers, he calls the developers on their laziness, quipping, "Barrels. I can see they gave the problem a lot of thought."

Fractured fairy tales scattered about hell serve as cautionary tales, but only to a point—they're far too humorous to serve as object lessons. And we can't help but laugh when Hotspur is killed by a demonic version of his love, Paula. After a fatal kiss, he collapses onto his back still holding the torch version of Johnson who is, understandably, facing upward. It's goofy enough to take the sting out of an unkillable enemy and an otherwise cheap death.

The fabric begins to fray at the end of Hotspur's stay in hell. Up until the final stages, the game is single-minded. It strays from the path with block-manipulating challenges and 2D side-scrolling segments. In the rough parlance of Mr. Hotspur, that garbage is hardly magnifico. It's during these moments we sense we're in a videogame, immersed in very obvious videogame challenges. Up until then, the game's vision is focused and laser-like, and we feel drawn to an inevitable showdown. Detours on the highway to hell don't amount to much, and as the gruff Hotspur we feel obligated to take no crap from anyone.

What did we learn in our sojourn through the shadows? Hell as done by *Damned* is a nice place to visit but a crappy place in which to flip blocks.

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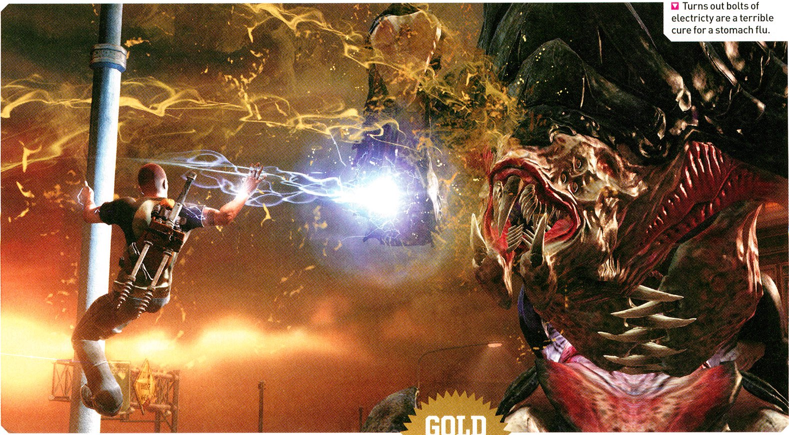
GREG ORLANDO



Turns out bolts of electricty are a terrible cure for a stomach flu.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine

inFamous 2

Is that a cattle prod in your pocket...

Info

Format PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev Sucker Punch
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like the voltage has been amped up.

Sequels are notorious for cranking things up. Bigger weapons, badder bosses, and better...*everything* has become a prerequisite when revisiting a franchise. *InFamous 2* easily meets and surpasses these requirements, but it's a number of subtler tweaks that make it a better game than its predecessor. Make no mistake, hurling electricity-laced tornadoes at city-leveling behemoths is a blast, but it's the less in-your-face refinements that ultimately recharged our enthusiasm for Sucker Punch's non-comic-based superhero series.

Less Is More

Anyone who's followed the game has likely seen videos of returning high-voltage hero Cole MacGrath tossing cars like empty beer cans, beating freaks with a cattle prod, and unleashing those aforementioned twisters. What they haven't seen is a vulnerable Cole firing blanks instead of his foe-frying bolts. But that's exactly what happens if players deplete all his power-fueling battery cores. See, Cole's arsenal has been amped to new screen-clearing extremes, but he's also been given a weakness. We could always spam the default fire in *inFamous*, dead batteries be damned; now at least one core must remain crackling to keep the juice flowing. This seemingly minor change fixes the first game's flawed combat. As kick-ass as it was lighting-up Reapers and Dustmen, most players did so with grenades and bolts, never needing to fully explore the breadth of Cole's baddie-barbequing abilities. Because we're no longer allowed to fire attacks until our fingers blister, we're forced to actually manage our powers with strategy in mind, replacing button-mashing complacency with more dynamic combat.

By extension, this improvement also gives melee attacks—barely used in *inFamous*—a chance to shine as bright as Cole's more excessive electrical abilities. The Amp, an oversized tuning fork-looking device coursing with blue bolts, doesn't drain any juice, so it

Five good ways To enjoy user-generated content

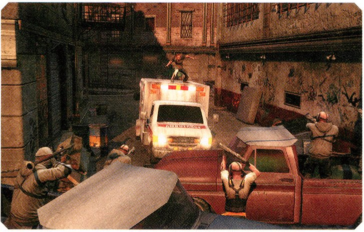
1 **CREATE** Budding game designers can craft their own missions with an intuitive creation tool.

2 **PLAY** Seek out green mission markers on the mini-map to check out other users' creations.

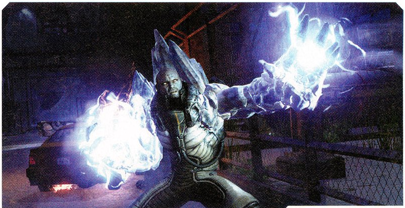
3 **EARN** Complete user-generated missions during the campaign to earn XP for in-game upgrades.

4 **EXPERIMENT** Use new weapons in user-generated missions, then unleash their potential on the critical path.

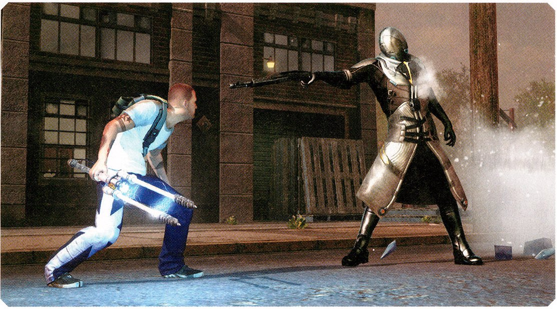
5 **RATE** Players can rate user-made missions. The highest-rated creations rise to the top of the heap.



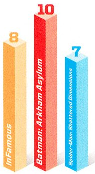
This is where Cole's music video shoot went drastically wrong. Fortunately, he can whip those trucks at his assailants or simply run up the walls and escape.



Missions can feel rote, but the stellar boss battles help make up for it.



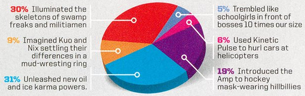
quickly becomes the new go-to flesh-fryer when Cole's batteries go dark. Despite the camera getting a little squirrelly during confined encounters, wielding this up-close death-dealer yields some of *inFamous 2's* most visceral moments. We especially enjoyed dropping from rooftops onto clusters of gun-toting goons then beating them like human piñatas with the electric stick. Even after unlocking far more devastating powers late in the game, the Amp's upgrades and slo-mo finishers kept us coming back to it until the very end.



ScorePole

InFamous 2 inches Cole ever closer to Bruce's legendary outing.

What we did in... inFamous 2



Not So Serious

On top of improved combat, *inFamous 2* benefits from a lighter tone. While Cole was certainly cooler than all those codpiece-wearing comic book geeks, he was also pretty somber. Cole 2.0, who no longer speaks with a two-pack-a-day gruffness, is more playful. The Karma system, which again allows players to choose a good or evil path, also shows a softer side. Sure, Cole's morality is still on the line, but the introduction of Nix and Kuo—two female allies with powers of their own—injects a little more fun into his life-or-death decision making. Thanks to their opposing personalities, complemented by entertaining banter, the Karma system feels more like an organic extension of the story rather than a preachy game mechanic.

Moving the action from a post-disaster metropolis to a lively New Orleans-inspired city also lightens the grim vibe. New Marais is brimming with history, culture, personality, and an actual color palette. Players can even earn evil points by tormenting street performers—we generally stuck to the path of righteousness but couldn't resist zapping those annoying silver-painted mimes.

New Marais also sports plenty of environmental variety: Soggy swamplands, ancient graveyards, flooded towns, abandoned train yards, and bathed-in-neon red-light districts are as diverse as they are pretty. The new locale provides a better playground for the nimble hero: More (and faster) power lines improve grinding, while new electricity-charged pipes shoot Cole up the sides of structures. More prevalent life-siphoning water areas also add a new danger element to the parkour-driven play.

While the many, smaller refinements make for an all-around tighter experience than the title that spawned it, *inFamous 2* also packs the expected blockbuster improvements. From enemies—such as swamp mutants, southern-fried militia psychos, and bosses that'd make Kratos soil his loin cloth—to tons of special effects-spewing superpowers, new dangers and fresh ways to deal with them await Cole at every turn. An absorbing narrative and vastly enhanced in-game cutscenes and motion-comic movies also do an impressive job building on Cole's origin story. *InFamous 2's* zap-happy protagonist may be comparatively new to the superhero scene, but his latest romp already sees him surpassing the cape-and-cowl crowd.

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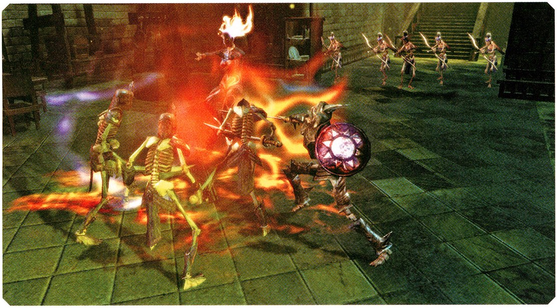
MATT CABRAL

▲ While there's much grinding to be had in *Dungeon Siege III*, the bosses provide intense, hectic battles that require fast timing and a smart use of powers.



Dungeon Siege III

Lost in time, yearning to be loved

Info

Format PS3
Pub Square Enix
Dev Obsidian Ent.
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a long-lost late PS2-era dungeon crawler.

Loot matters in a dungeon crawler. Developer Obsidian obviously understands this, as *Dungeon Siege III* absolutely showers players with it. Unfortunately, most of the loot is useless junk. Even near the end of the decently lengthy campaign we were pulling low-level items out of big gleaming treasure chests. While rummaging through crappy pieces of armor was initially novel, it soon felt like a chore.

Dungeon Siege III struggles for relevance in the modern gaming era while also working to satisfy console gamers. It seems to think PS3 gamers don't want much role-playing in their RPGs, but it also thinks adding a 4 percent damage boost is a significant strategic decision. It has no consumable items like potions, but offers a million different types of armor that affect stats in insignificant or ambiguous ways. (What does adding 15 points of Doom *do?!*) It presents the illusion of choice: Players have plenty of options, but equipping whatever has the highest stats works every time.

While the RPG elements feel convoluted and arbitrary, the actual combat is excellent. Face buttons activate powers, which drain Focus. Normal attacks reclaim Focus. This mechanic creates a hypnotic rhythm and encourages careful planning, as well as a lot of sticking-and-moving. Switching between "stances" also grants access to different powers and regular attacks, adding to the tactical nature of the combat.

The story moves through wonderfully varied locations: quiet forests, a whimsical swamp, a steampunk city, and, of course, dark dungeons. The world design is beautifully detailed and encourages exploration. Disappointingly, the excellent art direction is hampered by the PS2.5-level visuals that feature muddy textures, embarrassingly robotic dialogue animations, and a bizarre fuzzy filter that envelops everything—as if somebody wanted to cover up the dated-looking visuals.

The co-op works mostly without a hitch. Having both players restricted to a single screen's area became awkward at times, but coordinating powers added a significant tactical dimension to the game.

Dungeon Siege III boils down to one word: scrappy. It hasn't completely succeeded in updating its formula for the current generation, yet that's part of its charm, especially for those yearning for an old-fashioned dungeon crawler on a console. There aren't many games like this for consoles, so it shakily fills a niche that most certainly needed filling. Besides, there's just something special about tiny characters carving a swath of death through winding, torch-lit corridors.

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MATT KEAST

Cars 2 The Video Game

A kid's game with some horsepower

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Disney Int.
Dev Avalanche Software
Price $49.99 **ESRB** Everyone 10+
It's like a car that isn't too embarrassing to drive.

In case its personified vehicles didn't give it away, we can say with the utmost certainty that *Cars 2* is a kid's game. Based on the new Pixar film, it's an accessible racer with a distinct *Crash Team Racing* aftertaste. Players pick from a multitude of recognizable characters, such as Lightning McQueen and Mater, and take on tracks all over the world in a spy-training program.

The game features several different modes including Hunter, where players must track down enemy cars in waves of increasing difficulty, and Battle Race, where the track is littered with weapons. Just beware of the game's overpowered "power attacks." Get nailed by one near the end of a race and there's little hope for redemption.

Though a mix of different race styles keeps the game from feeling too stale, the recycling of tracks and overused car catchphrases get repetitive, and with only six levels to complete, *Cars 2* isn't particularly long. Fortunately, the game is fleshed out with four-player co-op and an online multiplayer component, and the ease of controls and cutesy, familiar characters make this a great game for the young'uns. **ANNE LEWIS**

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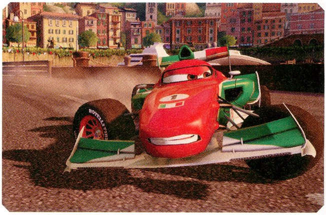
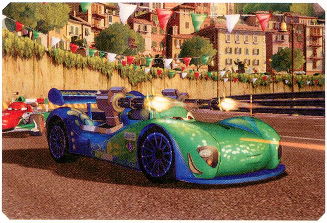
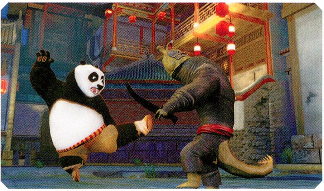
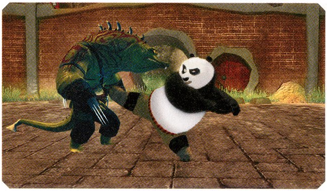


Who needs *Gran Turismo* when we can play a game featuring talking cars that shoot at each other with machine guns?







Gotta have some Panda Fu? Track down Activision's surprisingly well done *Kung Fu Panda*, released in 2008.

Kung Fu Panda 2

A species worthy of extinction

Info

Format PS3
Pub THQ
Dev Griptonite
Price $39.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like the bad movie-licensed game has risen from the dead.

When we buy a ticket to a *Kung Fu Panda* movie, we can expect humor, cleverness, quality animation, and fun. None of these attributes can be found in *Kung Fu Panda 2*.

The kindest observation that can be made about *Panda 2* is that it looks reasonably attractive...when nothing is moving. As soon as the camera pans or more than two enemies confront our hero Po, the framerate begins chugging and the controls start lagging. The developers didn't even attempt to sync the spoken dialogue with character animations. The game would have been better served dubbed in broken English as a semi-plausible tribute to classic Kung Fu flicks.

The gameplay is simple and functional, involving copious amounts of uninspired bad guy bashing and barrel/box/vase smashing for collectibles. There's also the occasional puzzle element that even six-year-olds will find unchallenging. We're unsure whether to be relieved or outraged that the entire game lasts a mere four hours, but considering that the PS3 game lacks the Xbox version's motion-control support and there's no multiplayer or replay modes, we're leaning toward outraged. **ROGER BURCHILL**

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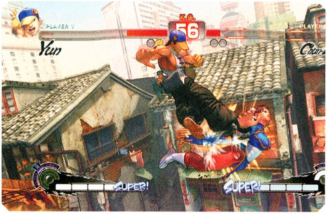
Any true street fighter knows it takes years of dedication and practice to learn that the trick is to hit the other guy until he dies.



Super Street Fighter IV Arcade Edition

Round 3! Fight!

Not quite a new game but certainly more consequential than regular DLC, *Super Street Fighter IV: Arcade Edition* exists in a strange middle ground. While the leap from *SFIV* to *Super* was big—offering 10 new characters, balance tweaks for the existing cast, and new Ultra moves—*Arcade Edition* is less substantial, with only four new characters, minor tweaks to the cast, and upgraded video replay options.

The new characters are the main draw. Yun and Yang are the standouts—they're aggressive and fun to play, equipped with great options for almost any situation. Evil Ryu plays, unsurprisingly, like a more aggressive version of Ryu, and the brand-new Oni is a strange mash-up of Akuma and Gouken.

Arcade Edition is diminished by a lack of features, though. There's no Trial challenges for the new characters, and the aforementioned tweaks to the existing cast aren't explained, which may leave new or even casual players feeling confused. *Arcade Edition* is definitely aimed at the die-hard fans that will figure it out for themselves.

At $14.99 for four new characters and cast adjustments, this update provides value for those die-hards, but players looking to pick up their first version of *Street Fighter IV* might be better off sticking with the cheaper and still fully online-compatible *Super* rather than investing in a standalone *Arcade Edition* disc.

MICHAEL GRIMM

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** Capcom **Dev** Capcom **Price** $14.99 DLC; $39.99 disc **ESRB** Teen **It's like** a fairly priced update that's strictly for the hardcore.

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Where are you going?
There's a mandatory orientation for all the new students.

REWARD
DEPTH
BARRIER
BARRIER
CRITICAL

BARRIER
BARRIER
HAKUMEN

BlazBlue Continuum Shift II

Freshly expanded to fit the small screen

Don't be fooled by the "II" in its title—this is nothing more (or less) than an expanded port of PS3's *BlazBlue: Continuum Shift*, itself arguably just a retooled expansion of *BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger*. However, that also means it's fantastic, and seeing *Shift's* beautifully animated 2D sprites and insane fighting action on the PSP is even more impressive than last year's *Calamity Trigger Portable*.

For the uninitiated, *BlazBlue* takes a unique approach to over-the-top brawling, offering up a mix of oddball characters that range from more traditional projectile-focused fighters to warriors with bizarre gimmicks like grappling chains, the ability to transform into wolves, or semi-autonomous, six-foot-tall puppet sidekicks. The action is combo-heavy and filled with layers of semi-hidden depth that make it both instantly fun for buttonmashers and intricate enough for hardcore fans.

Shift II incorporates all of the new gameplay mechanics, balance adjustments, and characters from the original *Shift* (including its three DLC fighters), while adding a few new story chunks and game modes like Abyss, a dungeon-crawler–flavored endless-battle mode. Of course, the real draw is the action itself, and apart from somewhat muffled voices and a noticeable drop in visual quality, *Shift II* is almost as great as the first *Shift* was on PS3—and we only say "almost" because ad-hoc network play means limited options for real competition. It may not be a "real" sequel, but it's hard to imagine portable fighters getting much better than this. MIKEL REPARAZ

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Info

Format PSP
Pub Aksys Games
Dev Arc System
Price $29.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a sci-fi *Street Fighter* gone berserk.

Hunted The Demon's Forge

Hack, slash, defend, repeat

Apparently, E'lara doesn't realize that *Hunted* has a cover system. Lucky us.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Bethesda Softworks **Dev** inXile Ent.
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like a synonym for repetitive buttonmashing.

It starts with a routine mission. A client asks us to obtain a vial of raw mana—a walk in the park for our two heroes. But upon completing the goal, Caddoc, a run-of-the-mill tough guy, glimpses a strange screaming face engraved on a dungeon's doorstep. Naturally, he convinces E'lara, our thong-wearing elven heroine, to explore said dungeon. We control either of the inseparable heroes (leaving the other character to either the A.I. or an online partner) while battling hordes of monsters, ghouls, and demons. When a bloodthirsty Wargar appears, E'lara fills its face full of arrows. When a skeleton rears its ugly head, Caddoc casually removes it with sharp, pointy objects.

Unfortunately, *Hunted: The Demon's Forge*, a third-person hack-'n'-slash action game, is fueled by clichés. We kill for hours, trudging through dark, linear, monster-filled hallways while employing monotonous attack-defend-attack strategies and enduring not-so-clever quips. Caddoc continually reasserts his masculinity by referring to E'lara as "girl" and ordering her around, while E'lara is an adolescent boy's fantasy: She shows more skin than self-respect and fruitlessly attempts to validate herself as Caddoc's equal. Despite their dependence on one another, the protagonists' clashing personalities is distracting.

Equally off-putting are the clunky controls, blocky textures, and lack of polish. Glitches and occasional clipping further frustrated our monster mashing. Yet for those who enjoy the old school, *Hunted* is littered with traditional dungeon-crawler trappings: Upgradeable skills, plenty of loot, and a lot of potion chugging. There's also a cover system, useful for taking on ranged opponents. Caddoc and E'lara's attack styles complement each other well, making online and local multiplayer more rewarding than the solo campaign. There's also the Crucible mode, which allows players to create shareable dungeons with customizable themes, enemy spawns, and weapon loadouts. However, the creation process is poorly explained, and finished products are fairly limited.

Hunted's attempt at reinvigorating a densely populated genre relies upon a tired formula. The result isn't terrible, but the game takes itself far too seriously and offers little we haven't seen before. **RYAN TALJONICK**

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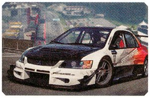
DLC Roundup

Crysis 2 Retaliation

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

Tired of sniping, pummeling, and blasting hordes of Nanosuit-wielding dudes across the same old NYC turf? This map pack dishes out four new multiplayer maps (Park Avenue, Transit, Shipyard, and Compound) to continue slaying online adversaries. Let the gunfest resume!



Shift 2: Unleashed Speedhunters

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

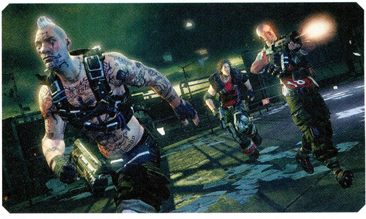
Inspired by the car aficionados at Speedhunters.com, this expansion offers two new modes (Drag and Standing Mile) along with more courses and cars. It also ups the challenge by disabling auto shifting and traction control.

Download of the Month

Fallout: New Vegas Honest Hearts

Price $9.99 **ESRB** Mature

Utah's radiation-free Zion National Park is a beautiful new backdrop for more loot scavenging and wayward murderousness. Getting entangled with the park's unruly tribal factions offers an enticing challenge for survivalists. There's also a five-level cap boost and extra equipment, though the coolest prize is a Yao Guai claw gauntlet.



Like the view? Good. Expect to see it over and over again on the long trek from the spawn site to the meat of *Brink's* action.

Brink

All dressed up and nowhere to go

Info

Format PS3
Pub Bethesda
Dev Splash Damage
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like some excellent ingredients went into a crappy cake.

We've got to give credit where it's due: *Brink* genuinely tries to take class-based first-person shooters in an interesting new direction. Rather than slapping players into the boots of Johnny All-American, tossing them into a linear funhouse of explosive set pieces, and saying, "Okay, run that way and don't stop 'til Hitler's dead," *Brink* showers players with character customization options and adopts a multiplayer-only approach.

Players *can* opt to go it alone, but that just means they'll be shooting a few intelligent (though not entirely flawless) bots instead of actual human beings. The missions themselves—though loosely framed by expository cutscenes—feature the same eight vs. eight objective-based action either way. In a way, it makes the game feel somewhat empty and repetitive—running the same 12 missions over and over gets a bit stale, especially when the objectives are both underwhelming and overly punishing.

Thankfully, the core combat is solid enough. The game gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "run-and-gun": Holding the sprint button allows us to automatically parkour our way around the (often awkward) environments. Vaulting over barriers and sliding under obstacles feels pretty liberating despite the fact that it's ultimately not that useful. In contrast to the movement, the shooting mechanics are vanilla but still serviceable. Weapons often feel puny, but the basic aiming mechanics consistently cooperated with our plans for match domination.

In the process of mowing down colorful freaks in bleached mohawks, tribal tattoos, and garish garments, we quickly accrued plenty of XP to spend on...well, more mohawks, tattoos, and garments, though new special abilities were also on the menu. Most of these upgrades are specific to one of the four classes—solider, medic, engineer, and operative—yet somehow fail to feel distinct. Really, what's the difference between buffing a teammates health or his ammo supply?

Each class began to feel a bit better defined as we slowly reached the higher experience levels, but all the game's intricacies ultimately feel inconsequential on the battlefield. At the end of the day, everyone's toting around the same guns regardless of their class, and the muddled HUD often forced us to stick to the most generic, easily understandable objective anyway.

Brink is essentially a mess of interesting ideas that fail to amount to anything larger. The combat is fun, sure, but shooting people in the face is always fun. The game comes close to something new and exciting, but as we all know, close only counts in horseshoes and heavily stylized hand grenades.

PlayStation The Official Magazine
6

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1
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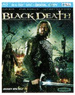
Black Death

Gothic plague horror done painfully right

Info



Price $29.98
Creators Christopher Smith, Dario Poloni
Starring Sean Bean, Eddie Redmayne, Carice van Houten
Rated R
Extras Deleted scenes, interviews, making-of featurettes.

Sometimes a movie is horror just because of its subject matter or the era it takes place in. In the case of *Black Death*, this is especially true. This is a gritty, dark, and violent tale about a group of mercenaries sent by the church to deal with a village that has somehow been spared the bubonic plague while the rest of Europe is ravaged in 1348. The church, of course, assumes witchcraft or necromancy is involved, and the men it sends are skilled at doling out murder and torment to any would-be sinners. Lead by a grizzled and mean-looking Sean Bean, the band stops at a missionary for a guide and finds a young and troubled monk to lead the way.

Black Death is tense, scary, and, at times, incredibly violent—largely because it portrays the time with such horrific accuracy. The nightmarish tools of the trade these witch hunters use are real and their nonchalance over killing any they deem to be sinners is believable. The path to the village is a violent one, but once there, the story slyly keeps viewers guessing as to whether there really is something sinister and supernatural at work. The movie does a remarkable job of showing both sides of its brutal equation. The might-be coven has a modern and even reasonable ideology about the evils the church inflicts on those it fears. Yet when faced with opposition, their reaction is equally as violent and cruel as the witch hunters.

The story's center is the young, naive monk. He's in wide-eyed horror through most of the movie, making the final act even more disturbing simply because we like and identify with him. It's a rare movie that works its horror magic in such an effective and believable way. *Black Death* never stoops to cheap CG demons or overtly gratuitous gore, but maintains a consistent level of tension through its entirety. The film intrinsically understands that real life is a lot scarier than fantasy.

Much of the movie was filmed with an intentionally gritty picture—particularly dark scenes—to add to the atmosphere. Beyond that, it looks and sounds great, although extras are on the light side. There's no commentary, but deleted scenes and some making-of featurettes are included with this superb horror film. JASON D'APRILE

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8

The Big Bang

Is neo-geek noir a certified genre yet?

Despite its illustrious history in cinema, noir has always been a niche genre, and most movies that fall under the label are straight-to-video throwaways. So *The Big Bang* is a pleasant surprise for lovers of the hard-boiled detective, dirty cops, and hot dames with big secrets. Antonio Banderas eats up the screen as Ned Cruz, a tough-talking, cynical private investigator whose backstory is never told.

The story is pure noir: A giant Russian boxer is released early from a life sentence and hires Cruz to find his dream girl, a stripper pen pal he's never met. *Bang* throws in dirty cops, 30 million dollars worth of blood diamonds, the mob...all the usual suspects that frame almost every detective story for the last 80 years, right down to frequently cheesy hard-boiled dialogue.

What makes *Bang* so fascinating is its juxtaposition of noir and particle physics. The movie manages to successfully parallel Cruz's search for the beautiful stripper with the mysteries of String Theory. Sam Elliot plays a billionaire who has built a super collider under a California desert town out of his obsession with finding the so-called God particle. The film is packed to the brim with clever physics references, and the story elements don't just fit together, but actually make sense.

The other noteworthy aspect here is the cinematography. Nearly every shot is a stylish display of color and framing that makes the film feel both classic and modern. The effect isn't gaudy, and the result is distinct and gorgeous. The commentary has enough interesting tidbits to be worth a listen, though too much time is spent merely recounting what's on the screen. There are extended scenes and a decent making-of featurette as well. For fans of noir and offbeat cinema, *The Big Bang* is one of the best detective flicks in quite a while. JD

PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

Info

Price $34.98 **Creators** Tony Krantz, Erik Jendresen **Starring** Antonio Banderas, Sam Elliot, Autumn Reeser, Sienna Guillory, Snoop Dog **Rated** R **Extras** Extended scenes, commentary, a making-of short.

Blu-ray Roundup

Madagascar

Price $34.99 **Rated** Not Rated

The BBC's latest documentary is spectacular, showcasing Madgascar's amazing diversity of bizarre and incredible animal life. David Attenborough's narration is excellent, and while the 1080i resolution is a bit disappointing, the picture quality is still gorgeous. Like most of the BBC's documentaries, this is highly recommend **9**

Alien vs. Ninja

Price $29.98 **Rated** TV-MA

When aliens invade feudal Japan, only the mighty ninja can stop them! With that set-up, we really wanted to love *AvN*, but this cheese fest is only for cult fans who like guys in rubber suits. The fights are decent and there's heaps of goofy gore, but also terrible overacting and bad slapstick. **5**

Goemon

Price $29.98 **Rated** TV-14

It's clear a lot of effort was put into *Goemon*, with its great fights and gorgeously surreal sights. Yet, the effects look so fake that it makes us appreciate Hollywood's mediocre CG-driven fare. *Goemon* tries to be an epic ninja fantasy, but it's ruined by goofy characters and an insane script. **6**

The Green Hornet

Price $34.95 **Rated** PG-13

Seth Rogan has officially overstayed his welcome. He turns the classic noir vigilante into a whiny, ineffectual, and witless thug. The only reason to watch this mess is for Jay Chou, who is simply badass as Kato. **3**

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people

Nixon The Unit

The Unit is water resistant up to 10 bars or 100 meters, and an easy-to-read digital display shows the time, date, and temperature. It comes in white, yellow, navy, black, and green.

$130

nixonnow.com

KEE Desk Phone Dock

Even in the mobile phone age, there's something satisfying about a proper handset. The white plastic dock will charge a phone as it sits, and even interface with a computer via USB.

$149

deskphonedock.com

Samsung Infuse 4G

The thin and light Infuse sports a 4.5-inch Super AMOLED Plus display, runs Android 2.2 Froyo, and the excellent battery life makes it ideal for watching videos on the go.

$199 (with contract)

samsung.com

Pinza

There are few things more bothersome than a home over-run by rogue cables and cords. These cord-tamers are cast from solid stainless steel and hand polished, and incredibly easy to use.

$26

pinzacord.com

Pokitt

Looking to replace an aging, bloated wallet? This ultra-slim accessory can hold two RFID smart cards—enabling the user to quickly scan either card, be it a subway pass or work ID badge.

$25

pokitt.com

Soundfreaq Sound Step

Few iPod docks are as stylish as the Sound Step. It offers natural bass response, and with built-in Bluetooth capability, audio can be streamed from iOS, Android, or other enabled devices.

$149

soundfreaq.com

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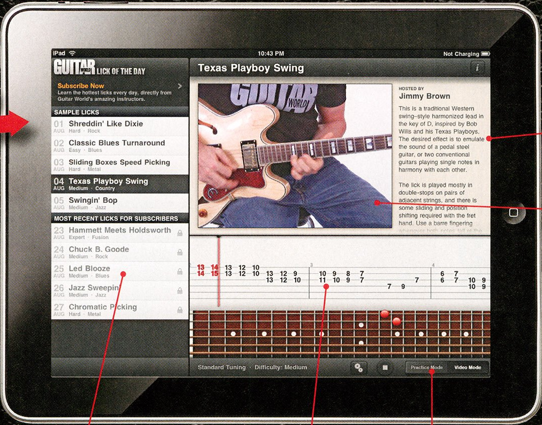

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Texas Playboy Swing

HOSTED BY
Jimmy Brown

This is a traditional Western swing-style harmonized lead in the key of D, inspired by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. The desired effect is to emulate the sound of a pedal steel guitar, or two conventional guitars playing single notes in harmony with each other.

The lick is played mostly in double-stops on pairs of adjacent strings, and there is some sliding and position shifting required with the fret hand. Use a barre fingering

Standard Tuning · Difficulty: Medium

Performance notes written by GUITAR WORLD

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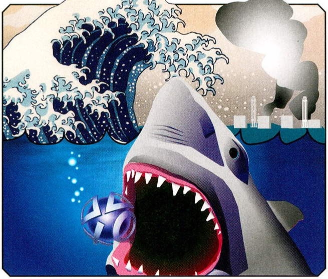
PS3
PSP
PlayStation 2
PlayStation
Official Magazine
LARA CROFT comes of age
SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD
Outrageous! Crass! Idiotic! Awesome?
SECRETS of the PlayStation Network revealed
REBOOTED. REBORN. READY TO RISK IT ALL
TOMB RAIDER
REVIEWED
SOCOM 4
Portal 2
Mortal Kombat
BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY
ESSENTIALS EL SHADDAI

We learned to patch wounds with Lara Croft. Now if only she could cure our lovesickness.

Mailboxes explode, PSN breaks our hearts, and Tim Schafer responds to some brutal rumors

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.



PSN Down

I'm writing to understand why you didn't mention the PSN outage (June 2011, Issue #46). Is it because it was too close to your due dates, or is it because you work for Sony and don't want them to look bad? I don't care about the fact that I wasn't able to play PSN; I just find it really annoying how the PS3 is always being hacked, especially this time. They took our personal info, usernames, and passwords? Can't Sony protect their own servers? I deserve to know as a customer how in the world this happened, why, and what Sony's going to do about it.

JACOB RYAN COLUMBUS, OH

Magazines are worked on months in advance of their publication, Jacob, and we didn't mention the outage in the June issue because it hadn't happened yet. We understand your anger and frustration here. This data theft is a breach of the trust we put in Sony. But let us not forget this was a malicious attack from outsiders—an event somewhat beyond Sony's control. That said, Sony has upgraded its security for PSN and will be offering credit protection to PSN users through Debix. These seem like good first steps.

A Man Called...ROGER!

In regards to the Et Cetera column (June, Issue #46), Roger Burchill states he bought a book called *A Man Called Intrepid* at a garage sale. Seriously, Roger? You work for a VIDEOGAME magazine! Are you really trying to convince us that you'd buy anything that isn't brand new/straight from the factory/gold plated?

DOUGLAS RIFFLE RATHDRUM, ID

Well, Douglas, despite what you may have heard about the jet-setting lifestyle of the international games journalist, it is always prudent to minimize capital expenditures whenever possible. After all, the mansion and supercar payments don't pay themselves. Now, could you pass the Grey Poupon? It's hard to move with all these gold chains on.

Going Postal

I used to subscribe to your magazine, but I accidentally blew up my mailbox and got in trouble...so my parents took away my subscription. P.S. I'm still waiting for a Scott Butterworth T-shirt. **JUAN ARAIZA** PARTS UNKNOWN

We have a system of laws, Juan, expressly forbidding cruel and unusual punishments, such as the elimination of a PTOM subscription for accidentally blowing up one mailbox. We say the punishment should fit the crime. Maybe your parents should, say, accidentally blow up your collection of bootleg Jack Johnson CDs. Piracy hurts us all, Juan, but it shouldn't hurt our paychecks—that's just not right. Also, we're totally working on the Scott Butterworth T-shirt. Right now, it is so blindingly awesome it melted our interns' faces clean off.

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

Paging the Reviews

Why are you guys wasting four pages on *SOCOM 4*, which scored a 7, and giving two pages to *Portal 2*, which got a 9 (June, Issue #46)? It makes no sense to me. Why would you sacrifice more space on a game that does not deserve it and less to one that does deserve it? I've seen this phenomenon in a lot of your magazines so I feel compelled to write in now to find out what the situation is. I love things to be in order and this is out of order to me.

Another thing, about the *Warriors: Legends of Troy* review. It got a 4 out of 10? That is way too low. I know it's not as good as other games, but it was a breath of fresh air after the first-person shooter onslaught.

ANDRAS GELENCER PARTS UNKNOWN

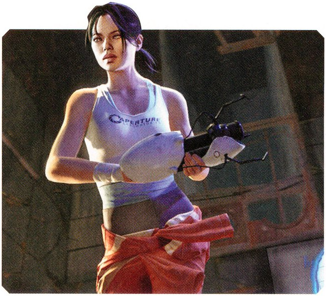
We base review sizes on a variety of factors, including importance to our readers, timing (are we early? Or late?), and how much there is to say about the game. Score is important too, but it's just one of several determining factors. And we smelled Warriors: Legends of Troy. *That particular breath of fresh air was one part New Jersey landfill and two parts intern after the double bean enchiladas at Burritoville.*

More + Better = Awesome?

This is in response to the "Are games becoming too short?" debate (June, Issue #46). I agree with Greg Orlando that quantity is not always better than quality. But it got me thinking: Why can't we have both? I noticed the price in games became much higher, but we are getting less from games. I would think that when I shell out $60 I'm getting my money's worth. Games such as *Homefront* and *Call of Duty* focus on how much money they can make with downloadable content. Not only am I paying $60 dollars for a very short game, but I have to shell out $10-$15 dollars more for DLC?

ANDY PARTS UNKNOWN

We're with you, Andy. Purchasing DLC to extend the life of an experience we loved makes sense, but feeling obligated to buy additional content to just pad out an experience that felt incomplete the first time around? Well that just makes us all kinds of mad. Except for Greg, who hates money and wants to get rid of it.



We Heart Greg

If everybody could write like Greg Orlando, I think the world would be a better place...or at least a better educated one. Greg, I tell you, do not stop your references and quotes. Educate your readers! It is people like you who prove that gamers—a lot generally regarded by the rest of media as ignorant fools—are quite intelligent and deserving of respect. Keep up the awesome articles, Greg!

JC CHAMBERS PARTS UNKNOWN

The world would also be a better place if Greg Orlando got that atomic scaldinator he's been asking for. Oh, and a pony that farts rainbows.

Feelin' Fine

I heard there's a bug in the PS3 version of *Brütal Legend* that corrupts save files once players get through 80 or 95 percent of the game. I've also heard rumors that Double Fine is working on a patch to fix it but has not released it for reasons unknown. Is a patch going to be released to fix this issue?

LINDSAY CANADA

We sent your note to Tim Schafer, head of Double Fine. He says, "That is a frustrating story. There is a bug in the PS3 version of Brütal. *We caught it right away and made a fix for it. Unfortunately we can't get the patch uploaded because none of the parties between the player and us want to pay to test it. Every once in a while we make another run at it but we can't get them to budge. I never stop thinking about it and someday I hope to find a way to make it right."*

Ask Gary

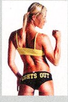
Q **How does PTOM go about picking the games that go on the cover? I really want to see another Nathan Drake image for *Uncharted 3*, but so far, nothing! What gives?**

SYDNEY CROSS CANADA

A We don't pick covers. They pick us, in a top-secret ritual that involves (in no particular order): sensory deprivation tanks; extended sessions watching Rainbow Brite cartoons being played backward; human pyramids using two interns and several members of accounting; and me picking up the phone and calling people in the industry to discuss various options.

Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM



@feliceherrig

"Forget that I have a bit of a crush on Felice Herrig. (Shh...don't tell my wife!) I follow this fighter (who I interviewed back in our May issue) because she's one of the most amusing people in my twitter feed. And now you should too."

GARY STEINMAN

Rice Krispies Cereal

"Bring forth the snap, the crackle and, yes, even the pop. Cereal should be a joyous affair combining sight, sound, and tasty goodness. Break fast in style, or suffer until lunch."

GREG ORLANDO

HBO GO

"HBO shows are exceptional, but I'm not always able to watch them at home. The GO service lets me stream every episode of my favorite HBO shows to my mobile devices at no additional cost. Simply beautiful."

ROGER BURCHILL

Sit Resist

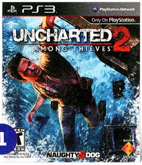
"Laura Stevenson is my absolute favorite female vocalist, and her new album *Sit Resist* offers 13 tracks of folky pop perfection that showcase her immense talent. Pick up the album, and catch her and The Cans on tour!"

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

PS3 Essential collection

Build the ultimate PS3 library with our no-filler guide to the best next-gen games

1


PS3
UNCHARTED 2
AMONG THIEVES
NAUGHTY DOG

Action Adventure

Uncharted 2
Among Thieves

There's no way around it, Nathan Drake is the PS3's biggest star and *Uncharted 2* is his most impressive adventure yet, with breathtaking action and an incredible story. No excuses: Get it and play it!

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Naughty Dog**

2

PS3
GOD OF WAR III

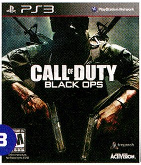
Action Adventure

God of War III

Huge beautiful battlegrounds and brutally gory fights with magnificent climaxes: we expected the world from the finale of Kratos' trilogy and we got it. A must-have for anyone with even the slightest amount of bloodlust.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Santa Monica Studio**

3


PS3
CALL OF DUTY
BLACK OPS
ACTIVISION

First-Person Shooter

Call of Duty
Black Ops

Black Ops improves on *Modern Warfare's* already awesome FPS formula. The franchise is in top form with a brand new single-player story, the beloved zombie mode, and its top-notch online multiplayer.

10 Pub **Activision**
Dev **Treyarch**

4

PS3
HEAVY RAIN

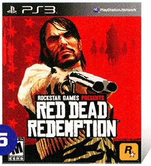
Adventure

Heavy Rain

Innovative, intriguing, and immersive, *Heavy Rain* is one of the most original titles in years. The mystery of the Origami Killer will keep you guessing until it's solved... or until the heroes die in the process.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Quantic Dream**

5


PS3
ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS
RED DEAD REDEMPTION

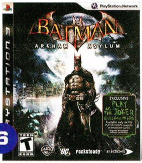
Open-World Shooter

Red Dead Redemption

Continuing with its record of amazing titles, Rockstar's latest open-world game combines a drop-dead gorgeous Old West with a mesmerizing story and fabulous characters.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar SD/North**

6


BATMAN
ARKHAM ASYLUM
PLAYSTATION 3

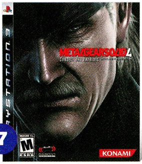
Action Adventure

Batman
Arkham Asylum

Finally, the Caped Crusader gets the current-gen game he deserves. Use a plethora of bat-gadgets and bat-moves to take back the Joker-controlled Arkham Asylum and love every second of it.

10 Pub **Eidos/Warner Bros.**
Dev **Rocksteady**

7


PLAYSTATION 3
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
KONAMI

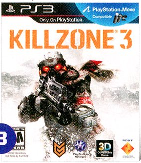
Stealth Action

Metal Gear Solid 4

Hideo Kojima's masterpiece might be criticized for its lengthy cutscenes and convoluted storyline, but that shouldn't stop anyone from experiencing one of the most important games on any platform today.

10 Pub **Konami**
Dev **Kojima Productions**

8


PS3
PlayStation Move
KILLZONE 3

First-Person Shooter

Killzone 3

War isn't pretty—unless you're playing *Killzone 3*. But the latest clash between the ISA and Helghast ventures beyond great graphics with improvements to combat, storyline, and multiplayer that propel it to the FPS genre's top ranks.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Guerrilla Games**

9

PS3
SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV
CAPCOM

Fighter

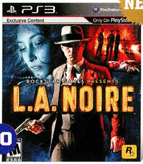
Super Street Fighter IV

An update to the best fighting game from the most well-respected series in gaming history makes for a can't-miss title. Kicking heads and nostalgia combine to form one perfect package.

10 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom**

NEW

10


PS3
ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS
L.A. NOIRE

Adventure

L.A. Noire

Rockstar blazes new gameplay trails again with its MotionScan technology that captures and animates facial expressions. Players must "read" people while investigating crimes in a vividly recreated 1940s Los Angeles.

9 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Team Bondi**

Team Choice

Dirt 3

"Driving games tend toward simulation or arcade racers. *Dirt 3* offers a nicely balanced experience between the two extremes where Rally fans can still enjoy technical cross-country time trials before partaking in fun drift-happy Gymkhana events."

Roger Burchill
Managing Editor

Power
Custom silicon harnesses crisp HD, ear-splitting audio, multi-processor might, and Blu-ray to deliver pure gaming perfection.

Online
Surf the net, message friends, and download movies, music and expansion packs, plus demos and games from the PlayStation Store.

Connectivity
USB slots to plug in DualShock pads and many other devices.

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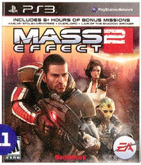


11

Role-Playing Shooter

Mass Effect 2

Mass Effect 2 features a spectacular story wrought with intense action and game-changing decisions, and the PS3 version of BioWare's third-person shooter/RPG is the franchise's best. Bring on *Mass Effect 3*!

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **BioWare**

12

Platformer

LittleBigPlanet 2

Oh Sackboy, how we love thee. The biggest little game on PS3 is rocking our worlds with its sequel. The standard in-game fare is excellent, but it's the ingenious levels crafted by the the fan community that truly amaze and delight.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Media Molecule**

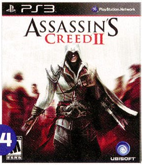
13

Role-Playing

Final Fantasy XIII

It takes a bit of a commitment and the gameplay is more linear in this outing, but the gorgeous visuals, crazy deep combat, and oh yes, the lovely heroine Lightning, make this RPG more than worth getting into, and through.

10 Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Square Enix**



14

Stealth Adventure

Assassin's Creed II

While the first *Assassin's Creed* may not quite have lived up to its full potential, Ubisoft built off what they learned to create the best parkour-influenced stealth game of all time. It doesn't hurt that it's awfully pretty in action either.

10 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**

15

First-Person Puzzler

Portal 2

Valve's insidiously creative puzzle adventure twists our perception of reality and tosses it through gateways we shoot into its walls. If your brain starts hurting, invite a friend—co-op adds a "hole" other dimension to gameplay.

9 Pub **Valve / EA**
Dev **Valve**

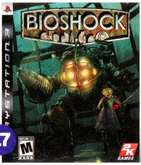
16

Driving

Need For Speed Hot Pursuit

The high-speed pursuits from the good old days are back and they look better than ever. Race the cops or join them, but the cars are hot either way so don't let that sway which side of the law to select.

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Criterion Games**



17

First-Person Shooter

BioShock

One of the most beautifully designed shooters of all time with an amazing story to boot. Due to the freshness and originality of the first romp through Rapture, we recommend the original over the still magnificent sequel.

10 Pub **2K Games**
Dev **Irrational Games**

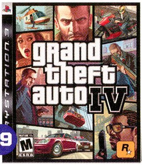
18

Sports

MLB 11 The Show

Consider the sport of baseball a PlayStation exclusive as there's no better videogame representation of the American pastime. The Move-supported Home Run Derby adds arcade fun on top of the simulation perfection.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCE San Diego**



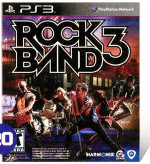
19

Open-World Action

Grand Theft Auto IV

There's a reason why *GTA* sells like crazy. This open-world gangster game is one of the most incredible achievements that the videogame medium has to offer. Great story, great characters, great adventure. Just plain great.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar North**



20

Music

Rock Band 3

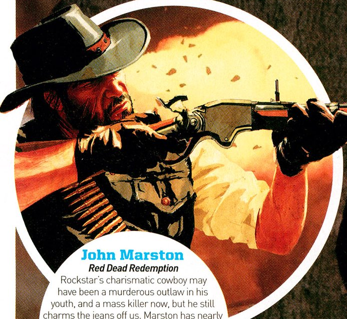
Didn't think we could pass up the best party game going right now, did you? With a massive songlist and the brilliant new Pro mode, *Rock Band 3* easily overtakes its rival *Guitar Hero* for the top music game on PS3.

9 Pub **EA/MTV Games**
Dev **Harmonix**

Rad Bad Guys

PlayStation villains that are too cool to hate

OCELOT IS HOT



John Marston

Red Dead Redemption

Rockstar's charismatic cowboy may have been a murderous outlaw in his youth, and a mass killer now, but he still charms the jeans off us. Marston has nearly offed as many men as smallpox, yet his roguish good manners are irresistible. By the time he returns to the simple ranching life near the end of his adventures, he's captured our old-timey heart no matter how many innocents were left hogtied on train tracks.

Ocelot

MGS3: Snake Eater

Before growing the most awesome moustache this side of Captain Price, Ocelot was a covert triple agent. He first met eventual mentor and friend Big Bos during the Cold War, and though they sper most of Snake Eater trying to plant bullet in each other's faces, there's a clear mutual respect. Accompanied by a kickass score and death defying gun-juggling tricks, Ocelot is more BFF material than enemy.

CHELL 4 GLADOS FOREVER

Joker drives ME CRAZY

Majima

Yakuza

If there's anyone we can trust, it's a gangster with the handle "Madman of the Shimano Family." Majima's stabby tendencies might make him a proper evildoer, but his sense of honor is rooted firmly in Camp Hero. We love his weird obsession with series star Kiryu Kazuma—he wants to off him so badly he's actually saved Kaz from other killers. Plus, he totally pulls off the eye patch look, meaning we automatically worship him.

GLaDOS

Portal

Portal's deranged A.I. is constantly trying to murder us in cruel and unusual ways, and yet...we still think fondly of her. She's a tortured soul, created to test human guinea pigs to their limits, but she's tragically self-aware. Her cold logic and bizarre etiquette are charming, wrapping her increasingly insane demands in a layer of humor that's...human. And in *Portal 2* she softens up. A bit.

The Joker

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Batman's greatest enemy is the most evil clown since... Actually, all clowns are evil. Taking great delight in trying to drive the Dark Knight insane, the Joker ends up running Gotham's infamous asylum through ingenious trickery—the lunatics literally take over the asylum. And yet, it's hard to bear too much ill feeling toward a guy who uses laughing gas and pranksterish chattering teeth to do his murdering.

BLEACH ブリーチ
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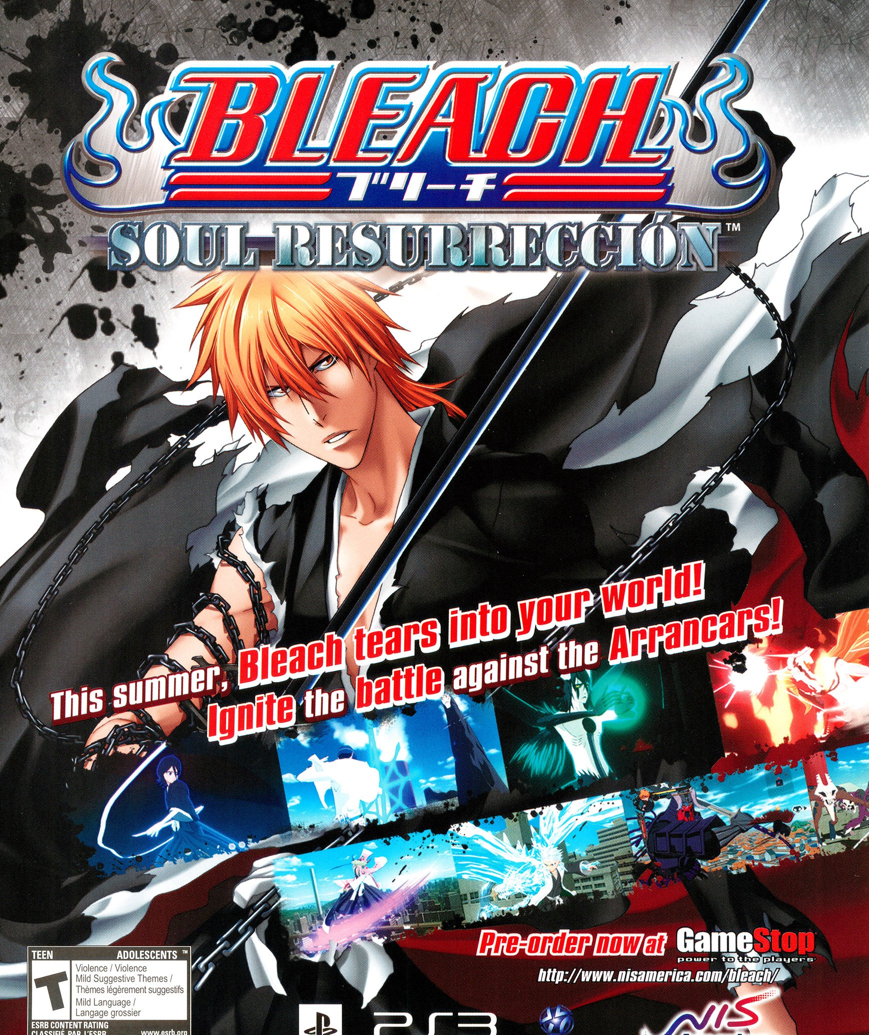
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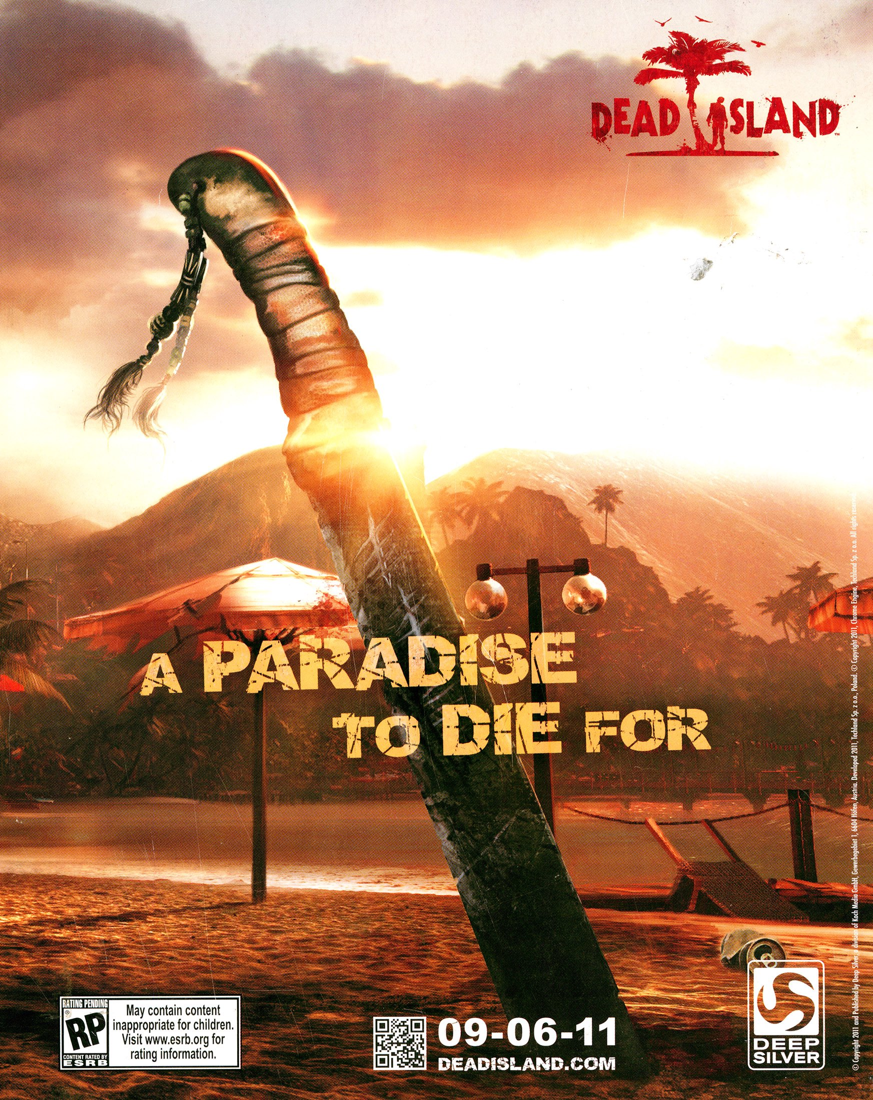
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